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Isabel and Alfred Bader Lecture in European Art with Dr Cécile Fromont

"Encounter as Author in Early Modern Images from the Atlantic World"
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SPEAKERS
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TRANSCRIPT

Dr Suzanne van der Meerendonk: Hello. Can everyone hear me OK? All right. So welcome to today's program, the Isabel and Alfred Bader Lecture in European Art, given this year by Dr. Cecile Fromont. My name is Suzanne van de Meerendonk and I'm the Bader curator of European Art at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre here at Queen's University. Before we begin this conversation tonight, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge that Queen's University is situated on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Huron-Wendat. There are many Indigenous people from these nations as well as others from across Turtle Island, who continue to live on and in relation to this land, and whom I would like to recognize for their role as stewards and as our ultimate hosts while we gather here tonight. Kingston or Katarokwi belongs to territories falling under the Dish with One Spoon Wampum, which urges us to peaceably share resources. It is referred to in Treaty 57 as lands acquired in the 1783 Crawford purchase, but one node in a longer colonial history that both predates that dubious and unrecorded event and extends into our present moment. I am myself a somewhat recent settler of Indonesian and Dutch heritage, coming here from the Netherlands by way of what is now the United States. I do not take lightly both the political implication and deep privilege inherent to working and building a new life on these lands as an uninvited guest. As a Dutch citizen and caretaker of a large collection of Netherlandish art, I also want to acknowledge in particular the long history of Dutch settler colonialism in this larger region, which started with the first Dutch ship arriving in Lunaapeew territory via the Muhheakantuck, now also called Hudson River in 1609. In 1623, so 400 years ago this year, the New Netherland colony building on earlier trade settlements was founded. As part of this history, it should also be recalled that Dutch settlers concluded a treaty with Haudenosaunee representatives, known as the Two Row Wampum in 1613, which meant to agree on basic principles of equality and friendship between our peoples and also pertains to these lands. While seemingly reflecting a desire to enact a relation of reciprocal respect, this relationship was in reality always fraught. And Europeans disregard of their responsibilities under this treaty are recorded throughout history. As we think deeply and thoughtfully tonight about the manifold ways in which cultures during this same historical period came into contact, overlapped, mixed, and mutually transformed each other, I commit to better understanding how my own presence and relationships with the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island

can either continue or break long repeated patterns in the present. So today, I am pleased to welcome both our in-person audience and those joining us on the Isabel's Digital Concert Hall. We have automated live captioning available and we have ASL interpretation provided by Rénee and Janice. Thank you all very much for being here. If you have any questions during the lecture, please hold those for the Q&A period following the lecture. And for those of you who are joining us in person, we'll also have a reception with food and drinks when the lecture concludes and a bar will be open at that time. We gratefully acknowledge the Bader Legacy Fund for making this program possible. Before I introduce our esteemed speaker, Dr. Fromont, I will take advantage of this stage just very briefly to make a few announcements.

Today, 15 November, is designated Bader Day by Queen's University in honour of the countless and truly immeasurable contributions made to our university, including to Agnes and to the Isabel by the late Dr. Alfred Bader and the Bader family. Tonight, we want to celebrate in particular the memory of Isabel Bader, who passed away last year and is dearly missed this evening. This lecture series came into being during the final years of Isabel's life with support from Bader Philanthropies where the philanthropic mission of Helen, Alfred, and Isabel Bader is carried forward by an amazing team of people including Alfred and Helen's sons, Daniel and David Bader. Thank you so much for what you do here for us and for so many others elsewhere. The Isabel and Agnes have worked in close partnership to present tonight's events and I would like to thank the team at the Isabel, Gordon, Janelle, Maggie, Alyssa, Aaron, Jesse, Tom, and everyone else for coming together in the same spirit of generosity and collegiality. It's really been a pleasure to work together. So thank you for having us.

In celebration of Bader Day, Agnes has released today as well the digital publication Reflections on The Bader Collection that brings together essays by the former Bader curators of Agnes, Dr. David de Witt, who is now at the Rembrandt House Museum in Amsterdam, Dr. Jacquelyn Coutre, who is now at the Art Institute of Chicago, as well as myself. You will find this publication on Digital Agnes via the link you see and please don't try to remember that link. You can just go to Digital Agnes and you will find it there, I promise. And in our respective essays, we discussed the lifelong fascination that Alfred Bader had for the artist, Rembrandt van Rijn, which is David de Witt's essay. The history of exhibitions made with The Bader Collection at Agnes, which is Jacquelyn's essay, and also curatorial experimentation in anticipation of the future Agnes Reimagined, which is my essay. The publication includes never-before-published images, videos, and archival documents that provide new and expanded context to the presence of The Bader Collection at Agnes. And I would very much like to thank my co-authors, Jacquelyn and David, for their enthusiasm and their thoughtful contributions to this resource. And also to my colleagues at Agnes who works very hard on the realization behind the scenes and, in particular, Danuta Sierhuis, who is our digital development coordinator.

So please check that out, but at a later moment because now we will finally move on to the main event for this evening. It is my great pleasure to introduce Dr. Cecile Fromont. Dr. Fromont is Professor in the History of Art department at Yale University, whose writing and teaching focus on the visual, material and religious culture of Africa and Latin America, with a special emphasis on the early modern period, the Portuguese-speaking Atlantic world, and on the slave trade. She has authored several acclaimed publications on the topic of cross-cultural exchange, including The Art of

Conversion, Christian Visual Culture in the Kingdom of Kongo in 2014, which, among other prizes, won the 2017 Arts Council of the African Studies Association Triennial Arnold Rubin Outstanding Book Award. She edited and contributed to the 2019 volume, Afro-Catholic Festivals in the Americas: Performance, Representation, and the Making of Black Atlantic Tradition. And contributed a chapter to the second edition of Early Modern Things: Objects and their Histories, 1500 to 1800, which appeared in 2021. Other texts have appeared in journals, including the Colonial Latin American Review, African Arts, Art History, and just recently the Renaissance Quarterly. Tonight's lecture focuses on a previously unpublished collection of Italian missionary Capuchin watercolours that featured in her latest book project, Images on a Mission in Early Modern Kongo and Angola, which appeared with Penn State University Press in 2022. And I must say that the methodological considerations shared by Dr. Fromont in this book when it comes to images that, as she says, are created at the crux of cultures, are among the most generative and thought-provoking that I've read in several years. So I'm so very happy and grateful that she accepted our invitation to share her insights with us this evening. And I'm also happy to share with you that we have also a limited number of copies of this book for sale tonight for -- at the reduced price of $80. And you can find those in the lobby after this lecture. So as we are looking at early modern art, whether within this lecture series at Agnes or elsewhere, with recognition of the larger global context in which such objects came to be, Dr. Fromont reminds us that European art at this time took shape both in and outside of Europe and via the mediation of forces and people across sculptural realms. The early modern world was fundamentally one shaped by the conditions of encounter. And so I am so very pleased to welcome to the stage Dr. Cecile Fromont for her lecture "Encounter as Author in Early Modern Images from the Atlantic World." Please welcome Dr. Fromont.

[Applause]

Dr Cécile Fromont: Thank you so much. Thank you, Suzanne, for this so generous introduction. And for reminding us, I'm going to need that, yes, of the -- of our hosts on this land and of the ancestors that are with us when we talk about those topics. And I'm very glad to be here. And I'm going to clear a misunderstanding, I -- that I'm not a historian of European art, so much. So I can, you know, now address the question without thinking that I am a fraud here, but it will all make sense somehow. That's coming from the perspective of studying images and visual culture of Kongo and Angola, we can together gain a different understanding of what Europeans were trying to do at the time. So let's get started with a print.

An African man and a European friar stroll together in a eerily peaceful landscape. They are engaged in conversation and they turn to each other, sharing thoughts, no doubt, about the awesome cliff that they are approaching. It's the great Angolan geological landmark of Pungu Ndungu. And in a recent photograph, it is easy for us to recognize it and it's very dramatic. In the print, there is no hint of power dynamic, let alone conflict, that transpire from the carefully calibrated pair. The two men are similar in height, they stand with equal confidence, and they speak with uniform conviction. Needless to say, this is an unusual pairing of an African and a European man in an image created in 17th century Italy. In fact, in this period, the inhabitants of the African continent very much more often appeared under the brush, burin, or etching needle of European image makers as savages or as subservient figures in decorative motifs or sometimes as anonymous exotic characters. And I needn't show you any examples of this. If you're here, you have visited some European collections

of art in museums and you have seen such representation. And I invite you to think about it, and if you cannot summon one of these examples, maybe we can think about it, too. But in contrast, what we see on the screen is something quite different. It is instead the representation of an African figure as a fully realized protagonist. That representation is what makes our etching here stand out from the corpus of encounter images, those images that Europeans made to talk about their voyages outside of their own shores in the early modern period, so between 15 and -- 1500 and 1800. But that aspect that makes a difference for this kind of encounter images also makes it typical and maybe even emblematic of the vignettes that a group of Capuchins authored to address their relationship with the elite of Kongo and Angola, an area where they officiated as priests and as missionaries in the 17th and 18th century.

Between 1650 and 1750, as part of the apostolate in West Central Africa, Franciscan friars of the Capuchin order composed dozens of images and wrote hundreds of pages in the form literally of practical guides to the Kongo and Angola missions. They created this compendia for the edification of novice missionaries who are still in Italy and then would be preparing to go to Africa. These were literally practical guides. You can see the title of one of them, *Missione in Prattica*, there. And they were meant as pedagogical tools that only circulated in Capuchin Franciscan circles, even if some of the authors wished that they would come to the printing press. In these guides, we see the intricacies of the natural, social, oops, sorry, and religious landscape that the veterans had encountered in a region they had reached at the demand of the rulers of the Christian Kongo, which was one of the main local powers. And here, as an illustration and to kind of put us in that visual environment, I brought portraits of members of the elegant cosmopolitan Kongo Christian elite that were painted just years before the beginning of the Capuchin missions in the paintings for the 1640s. The friars also showed in their images the activities in the neighbouring Kingdom of Matamba neighbouring the Kongo, which was the land of the warrior queen, Njinga, recently of Netflix fame. And they also talked about their work in Portuguese Angola, which was the then emergent colony of Portugal. And here is painted by Capuchin, the governor of Angola, in the late 17th century. If we look at a map, we have the great Kongo River here. The Kingdom of Kongo is the main polity in the area, Matamba, of Queen Njinga to the east and south, and Portuguese Angola here, a little bit generously represented here.

In the manuscript -- illustrated manuscript, we have detailed scenes of everyday life. Here is a wedding scene. Examples of flora and fauna, isolated and labelled. Here's the kola nuts, ostriches, and also a thorough views of missionary life. And as you've seen, they are all footed with words of advice and admonition, that together form the really rich but also very idiosyncratic compendia from and about early modern Central Africa. So idiosyncratic, in fact, that most of these watercolours and ink drawings have confounded interpretation and remained unpublished in their own times, as well as in ours. This print on the screen, that will be our focus this evening, is among a few exceptions that did see the printing press but in a heavily edited format and framing. It appeared in 1687 in what remains today the most important source for Central African history. Friar Giovanni Antonio *Cavazzi's Istorica Descrizione*, which is a very large book, which I brought an image there, and it is hefty and more than 900 pages long.

And so in the book from which this lecture comes from, I study really, for the first time, the visual project that the Capuchin friars devised and implemented in and about Central Africa. Their didactic

images, I argue, in the book form a unique and exceptionally important corpus that greatly enriches our knowledge of the region and literally multiplies the European format visual record about the African continent before 1800. I also talk about in the book that the corpus really transformed my understanding of early modern global interactions in several ways. And when I say early modern, I'm talking about the period around 1500 to 1800. So these images changes our understanding of that period because it brings into focus the Capuchin missionary project, which was very important at the time, but hasn't been studied as much as other missionary endeavors, like the Jesuits or other Franciscans. This set of images is also interesting and important because it highlights a set of spiritual and knowledge-making interactions between Africans and Europeans that unfolded outside of a colonial context, which is very much different from a lot of other moments of so-called encounters in that early modern world between Europeans and others. So by analysing the fraught but collaborative relationship between Capuchins and Central Africans, that relationship that is pictured in the images, we can really deepen our understanding of religious exchange at large. We can enrich our grasp of the cross-cultural dimension of early modern knowledge about nature and about culture. And ultimately, we can see more clearly the role that Africa and Africans played in shaping that early modern world at large.

These are big and, I think, very important questions. But there is another contribution that I'm trying to make in the book, which is simply to bring to print for the first time in three or four centuries these images of Kongo and Angola and place them within the visual landscape of the early modern world. So in complement to the book and to the bounded, pun intended, possibilities of the paper format, I have designed in collaboration with MAVCOR Journal two born-digital articles. That is to say, articles that are always meant to be viewed digitally. The first here on the screen is called "Depicting Kongo and Angola in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries". And it draws an overview of the corpus of Capuchin images of Central Africa in connection to the published written archive about the mission. It features and thus makes readily available embedded early books that are within that article and visual galleries of 17th-century prints and manuscripts. It also, as you've seen at the end, has tables that are drawing connection between that image and that book, et cetera, which is very exciting but also a little bit tedious work that I've done in preparation for the book. And I have made available here so that no one has to reinvent the wheel. The second born-digital article is called "Nature, Culture, and Faith in Seventeenth-Century Kongo and Angola." And it's an even more dynamic page that allows us to explore in depth two central pieces of the corpus of Capuchin images. This first one, which I called the Museo Francescano drawing and then The Parma Watercolours, which is the main large manuscript that I study. In terms of content, the -- that article shows the images with my transcriptions and translations of the text. And importantly, for me, it has the functionality to allow readers to leave comments about the images, about the transcriptions and about the translation. So here is an example of one of those pages, where you can see and zoom and see the recto and verso of the page. Below is my transcription and translation notes and then a comment here by one of my colleagues about the content of the images. So that's when where you guys come in and I hope we'll go play with it and maybe make connections between Kongo and Angola and some other areas that you are interested in.

So if that kind of corpus building and through it really field building and this is blank, intentionally, is an essential part of my work. Another large part of my reflection on this material has been concerned with what I think is the profound impact that the Capuchin Central African corpus of

images has on methods for the study of cross-cultural relations. And so I know when we start talking about methodology, the crowd goes wild, it's too exciting, but I hope you hear me out and I hope we can get excited about methodologies because it is important to our understanding of things. The Capuchin Central African images really challenge the ways in which scholars have approached and interpreted images created in cross-cultural environments, in particular, but not exclusively in the early modern period. The Capuchin Central African visual corpus emerged from a social and political context in which friars acted at the demand and under the control of local populations. And thus, it did not reflect colonial ambitions or visualize European fantasies about a savage or exotic other. Rather, it grew at the nexus of fraught but deep and lasting encounters and exchanges between clerics and Central Africans, during which both sides saw their knowledge and perspective transformed. So the analytical language of exoticism of that of postcolonial critique the idea of oppression and resistance are not fully adequate to make sense of the corpus. Instead, in the time that we'll share together today, I will suggest that the Capuchin visual compendia lead us towards a new approach to images of this kind that are wrought in cross-cultural contexts.

I turned first to literary scholar, Leo Cabranes-Grant, who has argued that attention to intercultural exchange increases the legibility of poesis, poesis understood as the coming into being of a cultural object. I find that the reverse is equally true that attention to the Capuchin images, processes, and conditions of creation increases the legibility of intercultural exchange as one of their originative and constituted features. In other word, what I argue is that attention to poesis demonstrates how, although the Capuchin vignettes were made by Europeans for Europeans in an almost exclusively European style, they are nonetheless cross-cultural in their sources, in their formulation and operations. So what I'm arguing here is that the inception or the poesis of images resulting from cross-cultural encounters, that is to say, the circumstances of the creation of such images should be considered as a form and as a source of authorial agency. These images were literally penned by encounter.

So let's go back to our print and consider the dark-skinned men clad in a short loincloth. He is one step in front of the friar and stands in a classical pose. He's an Apollo Belvedere seen from the back with the Roman marble sweeping drape, muscular body, and dramatic head and arm gestures made famous by Bolognese engraver, Marcantonio Raimondi, here to the right. The etched man, however, standing under the palm tree, also often associated with the Greco Roman gods, also shares his main attributes, the bow and arrow. But unlike the Belvedere prototype who once held this weapon in his left hand, the African man rests his bent right arm on the tip of his string bow while his left hand lifts a long arrow to point toward the impressive mountains in the background of the scene. He turns his head back to speak with a friar standing behind him while the arrow he holds elongates his index finger into a schoolmaster stick. The dart forms a conspicuous bold, dark diagonal intersecting the finny etched lines of the rolling hills. That the African man points with a left arm whereas in Central Africa, as elsewhere, you would direct the arrow with your right hand is important and draws attention to the projectile. The motif we will see is a hint about the original design that inspired the etching, but more immediately, its conspicuous graphic presence demands that it be not seen as a documentary detail or an early modern iconographic commonplace connoting savagery, but as a means to direct a certain reading of the image and a reading in which pointing arrow and dark-skinned man will play a central role. So how then do we interpret this figure?

The presence of these kind of small figures pointing or gazing aloft at the corner of expansive landscapes are common figures of early modern Arcadian scenes, imperial tableaus, or exotic vignettes.And here, I brought as an example a view of Niagara Falls for -- from another Franciscan volume. In the Central African picture, the motif of the two men really puts to work that trope,but also another one, one that is derived from the Franciscan realm. Read as a Franciscan image, as I think we should, the figure suggests how through devout contemplation and action, viewers, as devotees, can emulate Saint Francis's own imitation of Christ, an exercise that culminated for the saint in achieving conformity with God marked with the stigmatization, the appearance of the wounds of Christ in His hands and feet and side. As specifically Franciscan images, the Capuchin Central African vignettes, including the print, possessed that kind of iconographically implemented and theologically driven permeability to the world around them. They drew on Franciscan ideals of imitation and likeness that created a relationship between viewer and picture. The image literally inviting its beholders to immerse them self in the devout practices it depicted. So, the way that the images work is that Saint Francis imitated Christ largely by looking at it, but it's, you know, it's complicated. So, if, as a Franciscan viewer, you look at Saint Francis looking at Christ, then you are on the path towards the right kind of devotion. And in the vignette here, the mark of stigmatization is suggested in the print. And the setting of our encounter is also one that's recalling Mount La Verna which is the great mountain where Saint Francis got stigmatization and that we see on the print. And I brought another example of Saint Francis and his intent viewing, right? Hs eyes are literally burning out of his eyes -- out of his head there from the Agnes collection.

So, these details of the stigma and of the mountain really make clear that the image expected its viewers to want to imitate the friar it depicted at the bottom right and suggested to them what the spiritual rewards of this imitation might be, that is to say approaching sainthood. So, the image is drawing you into itself to experience that devotion. As a landscape and outside of the religious realm, it's also inviting the viewers into itself and, at the time where this is made, there is -- these theories that if you look at a painting of a landscape or print of a landscape, it's basically the same thing as walking through it. So, it's kind of like your workout plan. And so, it is working here in the image, in its missionary version of that. But what is important to us is that as a religious image and as a lay image, the Capuchin images and this one in particular invited their intended viewers to consider the pictured and the real world as concurrent and connected and to immerse them self in the depicted scene.

So, I took my cue from this fluid conception of the close connection and the porous relationship between form, content, and visualization to understand better what was happening in this corpus of images. I thought that if viewers are drawn into the image at the moment of reception, what and who gets drawn into the image at the moment of inception, on the other side of it? Or in other word, what role do the circumstances of the image's creation, that is to say its poiesis or inception, play in its construction? Considering the motif of the two men can be a key to this approach. The friar and the African man walk alongside each other, they converse, and I argue here, they reckon together about the nature and significance of the landscape around them, both real and etched. In echo to the iconography of small draftsman figures marking the landscape as drawn from life, the pair marks the print as drawn from their lived experience and as a product of their conversations. The motif of the two men rehearses, performs, and showcases the particular process of discourse-making that derived from their relationship both in the moment of inception and that of reception.

What the pair does then is to make the print a self-aware image that points to its origins in the encounter, even if fraught, and in the conversation, even if messy, between friars and Central African men and women. It not only records the unfolding of cross-cultural dialogue and negotiations,but also gives visual form to what these interactions are in the course of producing: a specific view of and visual discourse about early modern Central Africa. As such, the image points to its character as not only a European conceived and executed picture of Central Africa and its inhabitants but also as a picture from Central Africa and moulded by Central Africans in dialogue with Europeans. It reveals how African and European subjectivities contributed to shaping each other and the image in a process of cross-cultural discourse making honed in a sociopolitical context that was neither colonial nor devoid of prejudice or violence.

And it is crucial to underline here once more that the political and social environment of the Capuchin mission in Kongo and Angola was quite exceptional within the early modern world. It was far from the religious arm of a colonial overtake as Catholic missions were for in -- for example, in the Americas. Instead, the friars acted in most of Central Africa at the behest and under the control of local powers. The immersive Capuchin images of Central Africa thus invited viewers to plunge in a pictured space that both illustrated and reflected a social, natural, and political landscape that was wrought on the anvil of fraught cross-cultural dialogue, exchange, and negotiation but in which Europeans did not have the upper hand.

Let's look again at the print. It figured the African man holding his dart as a school master's stick stepping forward assuredly but also looking back to converse with the friar as an active participant in the scene. While its presence in the image alongside the cleric is, to some extent an index, a trace of Catholic Apostolic activities in Central Africa, it's also the one whose own elongated pointed finger determines that they take centre of the image, the here and now of the image. That position is of great significance in the representation of a non-European figure as a subject rather than an object in the print. Pointing and speaking, the African man is able to determine his own here and now, his own position within the world that he inhabits alongside the European figure. This depiction is particularly meaningful because the absence of subjectivity is precisely one of the recurrent distinguishing features differentiating the savage from the civilized in early modern European discourse of otherness.

This is blank, to a large extent, that idea of the newly encountered savage's lack of perspective was the actual great discovery that Europeans made in what they would later call the age of exploration and overseas expansion. This mental construction, the Great Discovery, emerged in Europe and found narrative form in travel literature where it appeared as an empirical observation or, in other words, as a discovery. And it was a discovery that would prove foundational for and fundamental to European modernity. A supposed lack of perspective became the cornerstone for Europe's definition of the other as savage and the foundation on which early modern Europeans constructed a newfound and contradistinctive awareness of their world as mutable and their individual worldviews as contingent.

Visually, these ideas yielded representations such as Theodor De Bry's 16th-century engraving of Indigenous Americans. De Bry's depiction of the American Man in The Marckes of Sundrye of the

Chief mene of Virginia here on the screen is paradigmatic of that moment. It is an image engraved by a European artist confidently picturing a corner of the world other than his own, a world what is more that he has not seen while the Indigenous man he depicts stands, in contrast, his back turned to European viewers. Even if he holds two arrows which art historian, Michael Gaudio, once suggested could be read as analogous to the engraver's burin, their tips are awkwardly turned inward towards his own body firmly placing back the would-be Indigenous instrument of inscription into the hand of the image maker. So, while the engraver pictures the other and inscribes him in his own epistemological realm of alphabetic writing with the text around it of iconographic references, the tattooed Indigenous man, a savage in this representation, is merely -- is even pointing to himself in a weak gesture of self-awareness. He stands alone in a world turned onto itself, his body the only canvas and measure of his self-enclosed and perspectiveless world. This is the classic image of early modern travel literature and of the genre's overall interpretation as a reflection and instrument of nascent European ideology about otherness.

In the landscape print, in contrast to De Bry, the African man stands firmly on the ground in -- he is in the process of defining and inscribing in words within the image as well as ink on the page by wielding his arrow-cum-etching needle with authorial authority and subjectivity. The view of the great cliff is in part his, that of an African who has entered in dialogue with the European man and beyond him with Europe's modes of knowledge making as well as technologies of inscriptions and communication. So, what the scene so strikingly stages is a shared early modernity in which both men are plunged in a common experience of the paradigmatically modern uncertainty derived from the multiplication of world views. The two men are immersed together in the landscape and in the arduous process of cross-cultural meaning making. They confront ideas and they exchange points of views. Together, they partake in the construction of an early modern Central African discourse about nature, culture, and faith. And this discourse is what unfolds in this image here and in the Capuchin corpus overall.

Without suggesting a naive and inaccurate interpretation of the Capuchin corpus and of the missionary activities in which it partook as a set of benign encounters, I want to underline the significance of the corpus depiction of dialogue between interlocutors of different cultural backgrounds. That depiction, that motif urges us to think broadly about the multiple perspectives that are present in the image. The social and religious context of the Capuchin mission yielded carefully calibrated images of collaboration and balanced powers between Capuchins and Central Africans. So, in each of those vignettes, you have the Central African ruler here or here or here depicted with the same height, in the same position as the Capuchin friar. They almost mirror in -- each other and they almost have the same bodily attitudes and are on par in everything, including entourage and regalia.

This is representing something that derives from the political situation in which the Capuchins were acting at the demand and under the control of the Kongo and Angolan elite and they had to fit within the fabric of Central African societies. And a core visual dimension of this atmosphere in the vignettes is the conspicuous presence of mestres. Mestres are those figures here that you recognize with their white uniforms that are always appearing just behind the friars. The mestres da igreja, or church masters, they were members of the most elite circles of the Kongo trained since childhood in Portuguese, Latin, and Catholic doctrine not by Europeans but by older mestres who formed the

backbone of the Kongo church organization since the 16th century. The Capuchin Central African corpus is filled with images of dialogues between friars and mestres and I think it is precisely such a scene that features in Cavazzi's landscape although the maker of the print misinterpreted the mestre's white cloak and staff of office. So, it's clear here that this was supposed to be one of those crosses and the reason why his kind of loincloth is going up kind of suspiciously here, it's because it was one of those mestre's uniforms.

So, what's implicit in the print then and even more so when we know that the African man there is a mestre is that there is a thick background that made possible the encounter and lively conversation that the print pictures, that the two men talk to each other means that one or the other has learnt the language of the other, that the African is a church master points to his status as the member of a sophisticated Christian society, that he holds the staff and the white cloth that emblematizes function of mestres shows how he inhabits a world with broad religious, artistic, and commercial horizons. And, in fact, the staff and the cloth are two items that local artists and artisans created by recasting once European and once holy local emblems into new objects of Kongo Christian visual culture. An example of this staff that is undated but in its formulation comes from that period is here on the left, and then I brought you the quintessential Kongo Christian object which is the Kongo crucifix on the right. And as a reminder of who we are talking about when we're talking about the mestres is exactly the same kind of individuals as Dom Miguel de Castro, the ambassador to Holland.

That mestre-friar pair that features in almost every Capuchin vignette showing missionary work is also present but in less immediately visible ways in every image of the corpus. Let's think about it. The observations and interpretation of Central African nature, culture, and religion that the images depicted all emerge from the close interactions between friars and mestres. And we do have precedence and parallel for this kind of collaborative image making process in the production, for example, of dictionaries and catechisms which were endeavors of linguistic and cultural translation similar to those in the watercolours depictions of natural and cultural landmarks. For example, on the screen is the 1648 Kikongo-Latin-Spanish dictionary, the *Vocabularium Latinum, Hispanicum et Congense* which was the work of Manuel Roboredo who was born in the Central African capital of San Salvador/Mbanza-Kongo to a Portuguese father and a mother belonging to the Kongo royal family. Obviously, a member of the aristocratic elite, he trained in the Kongo educational system, put in place and animated by the mestres since the 16th century, and most certainly -- almost certainly served as a mestre himself. The *Vocabularium* is a useful parallel to the watercolours in many ways, both works, for example, followed to a large extent an European template, some version of Nebrija's Spanish language dictionary for the *Vocabularium*, natural history of morals and customs album for the watercolours. They both used European modes of recording, alphabetic writing, or Renaissance-derived illusionism to record and translate information about Central Africa. They also similarly left largely unnoted the contribution of Central Africans to their composition and more broadly the extent to which they were the products as well as the record of African knowledge. And we know that the dictionary is the work of Roboredo because of other documents, but it is mentioned nowhere in the document itself.

Yet if that contribution of Central Africans was not explicitly recorded in writing except for a few anecdotes, moments of the exchange between friars and mestres did appear transversally in the

written and visual documents alike. In the images, the pair is shown in deep conversation in vignettes such as this one or the landscape print and these visual and written episodes really should call our attention to the role that Central Africans played in the projects that these documents record. These moments ultimately demonstrate how the European clerics that formerly fulfilled the role of authors in this project of translation worked, of course, with unnamed Central African interlocutors who were not merely informants or bearer of local information but essential and, in some cases, principal actors leading the way in those knowledge-making enterprises. The Capuchin vignettes not only picture even-handed power relation and cooperation. They also record the active participation of Central Africans in the creation of the mission's discourse about the region that the images picture.

And, in fact, at the level of practice, mestres were essential intermediaries and guides on whom the friar relied and depended in every endeavors. Mestres orchestrated the friar's movement, controlled their interactions with local populations, and even voiced their words. It was the practice, no matter how fluent friars would become in local languages, that mestres' repeat sermons on their behalf or intercede in the giving of sacraments. So, the pair routinely repeated, adapted, and redeployed each other's word essentially making them their own in the process. The mestres conveyed their own versions of cleric speeches and sermons to local African audience; friars recorded Central African oral argumentation and ideas in their manuscript for their European audiences. In other words, the production of a discourse made of multiple interlacing voices was a central aspect of the relationship between mestres and friars.

To put things slightly differently, the mestre in our engraving is not who Michel de Certeau once called a blank savage page on which Europeans will inscribe their desires and will through colonization. The French scholar and Jesuit's penned this famous formulation in a visual analysis of this 1580's print by Jan van der Straet in which Amerigo Vespucci encounters and gives its name to a nude female allegory of America. Van der Straet's image is emblematic of early modern European thinkers', artists', and rulers' conception and representation of distant others as inferior, exotic, and prime for political and epistemological conquest. Certeau's interpretation in turn is a flagship moment in the questioning of this ideology and the visual apparatus at its service. The composition of the landscape print revolving around the defining presence of a European-African pair could easily invite mistaken interpretation of the scene as another example of that type of encounter images that Certeau critiqued. Yet, although similar in its setting in a forest and its organization around a moment of close encounter between a European and a figure native to the landscape, the Central African print is strikingly different from the American one. The landscape unfolds in full contrast perhaps to van der Straet's image of European overtake and epistemological appropriation and imposition. There, there is no hint of conquest either sexual or territorial, no European instrument suggesting an inscription of European will or history on the land, and indeed, as we saw politically, Central Africa remained independent throughout the early modern period except for the thin Portuguese Conquista of Angola. The African man does not appear either to belong to the realm of nature, guileless, raw and as yet uncultured as the allegory of America. He is a self-possessed protagonist and the world view that the print captures is, at least, in part his.

On the inked paper, the point of the African's arrow and the tip of the etcher's needle who created the print meet and together recreate the line once drawn at the nib of the quill in the original

disegno. Composed through the efforts of many minds and many hands, the self-aware Central African image gives visual form to the circumstances of its creation. Its composition, though European in its form, emerged within a political and intellectual geography that Africans controlled even in the face of persistent European pressures. It is an image born at the nexus of European and Central African awakenings, conversations, and negotiation about the world that their relationship was in the process of shaping. European and African men are both inscribed and inscribers, subjects and authors, and their intense dialogue suggests shared, if not quite equal, authority over the description and interpretation of the scene. Instead of a blank page waiting for inscription, the African is linked in a chain through which knowledge about and from Central Africa and Central Africans is mobilized, reworked in dialogue with Europeans, then recorded and communicated to Italian viewers and to us today.

So, in a few words of conclusion, in considering the inception or poesis of representation as a domain of inquiry in itself, I propose a way to shed light on the otherwise hardly visible cross-cultural dimensions of the Capuchin Central African vignettes as expressions of a discourse about nature, culture, and faith that Capuchin Central -- that Capuchins and Central Africans co-constructed in the course of their interactions. The Capuchin images are not European conceived and executed pictures of Kongo and Angola and their inhabitants but pictures from Central Africa and moulded by the dialogue that unfolded between the friars and Central Africans. To be clear, this is not or not only about reading against the grain or uncovering subaltern agency hidden within the image. It is an attempt at seriously considering the origins of its representation in cross-cultural collaboration even if it is one that, in this case, did not leave visible traces in its style, in its iconography, or in its mode of production.

The stakes are high in recognizing that kind of cross-cultural poesis as a key dimension of at least some early modern European images, a dimension that would then fall outside of European cultural and epistemological hegemony and that demonstrates their nature as the product of multiple perspectives. On the one hand, it helps to provincialize Europe and to stress how the continent's engagement with the world beyond its shores, shaped its own visual core in ways that have been both visible and invisible in the early modern period and in our own time. Invisible because of ideological disavowal or because of interpretative shortsightedness that we are unable methodologically to see it. On the other hand, it responds to another fundamental challenge that scholars face in the study of early modern global interactions in the period 1500-1800. That challenge is posed because of the disproportion for many but, of course, not all regions, between a large archive of documents produced by Europeans and a much more limited number of sources authored by the historical actors, sorry, Indigenous to these very regions. This discrepancy is born from the history and structure of archives and is, of course, heightened by a historiography that has given outsized emphasis on certain types of documents over others as authoritative sources. Research looking anew into existing depositories, expanded methodologies, theoretical innovation, and attention to the many forms of Indigenous knowledge are needed to close that gap. And it is an arduous task indeed because these endeavors often remain dependant for access, for funding, and for validation on the backing of institutions created for and in support of the archives and knowledge systems that this type of scholarship aims to complement or sometimes even to challenge. In publishing for the first time in centuries, these long-overlooked images, as I do in the book and in the online article, I participate in this work.

The methodological approach I propose here offers another tool also beyond this essential corpus building or corpus rebuilding. It proposes a way to look anew at a variety of visual and written documentation about really the four corners of the world, records that were produced nominally, I would say now, by Europeans and without immediately visible non-European traits as cross-cultural productions. Identifying and analysing the multiple, complex forms of interactions that gave shape to the documents in the European archive concerned with the world beyond its shores, or in other words, considering their cross-cultural poesis, can we draw the landscape of possibility for the study of the early modern world. It can bring us closer to a decolonial approach in Walter Mignolo's sense of stepping aside from the epistemic grids of the European Enlightenment. And it is a move that I find valuable, not only or even primarily for the possibility it affords for counterhegemonic interpretation, but also and most crucially for the promise it holds of a richer and more nuanced understanding of the intricacies, range and complexities of the human interactions and cultural productions that shaped the early modern world. Thank you very much.

[Applause]

Dr Suzanne van der Meerendonk: OK. Thank you so very much. We will have now time to do a Q&A and my colleague Charlotte and myself both have a microphone that we can bring to you. Charlotte will be on that end of the room and I will be here. And if you have a question, just please make sure to wait until the microphone reaches you so that the people on the live stream can also hear your questions. So, does anyone have any questions to start?

Audience Member: Thank you very much. Are there no depictions of soldiers or merchants or is the art form totally religious?

Dr Cécile Fromont: Yes, thank you. That is a great observation. And yes, it is the nature of those practical guides to the mission to depict mostly what the friars understood to be of interest for the training of future missionaries. But the question of the lack of violence altogether in those images is really striking. I would say not completely altogether. There is one disturbing image or a couple disturbing image of the slave trade which they do address which is not an image of, you know, European military assault for example. There are two areas, direction in which to answer the question. On the one hand, it is very much because it was although there were constant wars between Portugal and Angola at the time, the situation that the Capuchin wanted to depict was one that made their European interlocutor understand that it was the Africans who had the control of the situation. So they were not depicting the European overtake that was not happening at the time. And on the other hand, the other direction is that there is a certain dimension of marketing in those images that they are recruiting new missionaries. So they're giving sometimes a little bit rosier picture of what the situation might have been there.

Audience Member: Thank you so much for that very rich talk and for doing the very difficult archival work that you've done to publish these. I wonder if you could tell us more about the individual friar who made the images. I was kind of wanting to hear more about that person. And they seemed to be quite precautious in terms of what they wanted to represent and is that fairly characteristic for

the Capuchins? Can you tell us a little bit more about the person that made many of those rich images in the portfolio that you shared?

Dr Cécile Fromont: Yes, thank you very much. There is -- one of the stories behind coming to the idea of encounter as author is that the main corpus that I study is an illustrated manuscript that has around 70 images that I found when, almost 20 years ago now, when I was doing doctoral research. And it was in a private collection and it was there, it existed. I could tell that it was Capuchin mission to Kongo and Angola and around, you know, late 17th, early 18th century. And then, I spent the next 15 years trying to know exactly who was the friar who made those images and when did he make those images. And I still do not know who was the friar who made these images. But by looking into it and then abandoning the idea, I actually realized that there were perhaps more interesting questions. At the level of that manuscript itself, what is really striking is that it is part of a larger set of manuscripts that imitated each other over a little bit more than a century at least and then were printed in that particular book for some of them. So, there is kind of a network of images there that existed, that was rich, that drew from European images that were in libraries in Angola and libraries in Italy. And there is kind of all this intellectual network that is there that I was kind of obliged to map and address. And so, that was the gift of not knowing who made those images. On the one hand, on the other hand, I think the project is pretty clear even though we don't have like a single painter. And I do know and it's a very complicated story that the image and the text were made at two different times by two different people. There is kind of the development of a certain vision about what images can do for missionary education that is very interesting and very typically Capuchins because we're very used when for those of us who spend time thinking about missions of missionaries using images to teach the people they catechize. And the move that the Capuchins made in that particular corpus of images is to turn back the lens to the missionaries themselves and use images to teach missionaries about Africa instead of using images to teach Africans about Christianity. So, that was very interesting to get at that too. So then the network itself is extremely complicated and I think, you know, it's really interesting but the, you know, the theology of it is interesting for what it tells us about the intellectual endeavour itself. Thank you.

Audience Member: Hi, I was just wondering about the natural history images that seemed to be part of the manuscript. And in the West, certainly with Aldrovandi and images of mermaids and things, it made me wonder whether a European sense of classification entered in, in terms of the natural history illustrations.

Dr Cécile Fromont: Yes, no, absolutely. So that's one of the other kind of a mystery a little bit of those images is that they have two sets of numberings on the pages which yield different arrangements and I'm not sure what they refer to exactly. One of them is following a pretty classic for European natural history, kind of Pliny-inspired land animals, terrestrial animals, etcetera. But there are all sorts of interesting digressions of, for example, what is a terrestrial animal or a water animal or things like -- because they're very dedicated to observation, right? Both in the images they're giving us that are quite detailed and they're referring to natural history because it's framed and they're isolated, etcetera. And the texts also say, you know, I know this because I've seen it and this is what it is. And then there is the unicorn. And, you know, it kind of breaks down into this delightful, you know, early modern moment of. But it's hard for us to interpret but it's really interesting. And I think in that case, it's really, you know, they're using kind of a synthetic mode of

representing a rhinoceros that -- and they're lying in having seen it. And they -- because they've heard the description that it is an animal as big as a horse with one horn and the person doing the text say, "Yeah, I think that's a rhinoceros." And I think maybe the person that did the image maybe was going for an antelope in profile. But so, there was delightful things. And that's why in parts, I've made -- I wanted to make the website where you can have comments because it is a huge amount of images about which, you know, we need to come together collaboratively to, you know, make connections and link them to other works because it will take, you know, years and decades to really understand what they were doing. Thank you.

Audience Member: Thank you so much for this talk. I am really interested in this idea of an encounter as author. And so, I have many questions but maybe I'll keep it to two. And the first is why would you argue that this image made it to print? And what do we know about its reception? And then the second is in light of this idea of encounter as author, in your most radical imagination, if this were in a museum, how would you label this work in terms of authorship, in terms of origin? And how might you imagine contextualizing it? What other kinds of objects would it be in dialogue with?

Dr Cécile Fromont: Thank you. These are two great, fun questions. So, why did this print -- did this come to print? It is complicated, partly on a misunderstanding because of an earlier -- the book is actually not the book for which these prints were made. It's related but it's not the same book and they were recycled. But in the process, we learnt a lot about what Europeans thought about those particular prints which are pretty close to the Capuchin watercolours and they were made -- sponsored by one of the Capuchins. And they do not like it. They say these prints are an assault on good taste, you cannot represent missions in this way, we need to redo it all, and then they run out of money so they have to use it anyways. That particular print is kind of an exception because it's obviously the most ambitious one of the series that it is a fold-out, it is quite big and it is made in Italy in the 1670s, so quite early even for landscape as a genre. And it is made by a friar and all we know about him is that his name is Paolo da Lorena, so from Lorene from the north which makes sense for somebody making a landscape at the time. And obviously, there is some kind of artistic ambitions with the repoussoir and like the long -- the atmospheric perspective also. But it's really hard for me to really understand what set of choices were made because it is -- unlike others, it is not really a missionary scene. It is not really a, like a botanical scene, it has those trees that are not really kind of convincingly represented for what they are. But I think at the end, it is about the cliff. And it is about the cliff because there are two possibilities or three possibilities. One, in the middle of the cliff is the Jesuit mission and it's a Capuchin project and maybe they're gaslighting the Jesuits. I like that idea but I don't know for sure. The second possibility is that there is the great cliff and it is the birthplace of Queen Njinga, so it's really particularly significant in terms of local history. And so they're showing the cliff as kind of that moment of collaboration like we are there, we have the Central Africans and we're going to convert the land of Queen Njinga. And the third possibility and it's something that fits with some of their written accounts that is more kind of on the lyrical side of things, right? That they're looking at this cliff and it's like, "Oh, is it made by man? Is it made by God?" We don't know. It's kind of wondrous in this sense without going too far into the miraculous for which the Capuchins are getting into trouble in the post-Reformation because the pope doesn't like that too much anymore. So these are the possibilities of why this print exists, but I don't know for sure. And as to how could we label this in museums, I'm going to be tongue in cheek and say,

well, for African objects, museums don't have any qualms just saying Central African. So, maybe that could be a way too to go for that. Thank you.

Audience Member: Thank you. That was really fascinating. I was wondering, you were talking a lot about the power relations in the images and how the mestres were in charge and they certainly are translating, they're interpreting the stuff that the friars are saying. But I was wondering the -- because they're still converting now, they're still Catholic, right? So, there's the religious dimension and perhaps in the text as well is there much reference to Kongolese religion and the challenges that these Capuchins as missionaries are dealing with, right? There's certainly a lot of respect, I can see that. But in terms of power, there's still this religious superiority, for lack of a better word, I don't know.

Dr Cécile Fromont: Yes, no, thank you, that's a great question and it allows me to clarify something important is that by the time the Capuchins arrived in the Kongo, the Kongo has been Christian for 150 years. It converted for complicated reasons, you know, by itself and it claims its stakes as a Christian kingdom and that's why they send ambassadors to Europe, etcetera. However, the Capuchins are not so delighted with the Catholicism that they find there, but they really approach it in a post-Reformation kind of way. And they're saying that, well, you know, the Catholicism of the people of the Kongo isn't perfect in the same way as a Catholicism in the countryside of Italy is imperfect. The people there are doing all sorts of crazy things and, you know, we need to make it better. There is also a range in the, what I would say -- I would call the tolerance of different missionaries. So, there are dozens of them who go to the Kongo over 200 years almost. And some of them are really OK with inculturation basically. And others are really not convinced. And mostly all of them are what, you know, we would clearly characterize as racist in their attitudes. They are not, you know, convinced of the, you know, the equality of the people that they are dealing with. However, when they deal with the elite, there is not a problem. That cancels ideas of race for them. So, they have a range -- I lost my train of thought. Let me try to recuperate it. So, part of their work is really to kind of identify kind of those moments, right? What is acceptable and what is not acceptable? And one of the reasons why this particular moment of Capuchin history is really fascinating and important is that it happens in its beginning at the same time as the Chinese rites controversy. And they are also propaganda fide, if that means anything to anybody, a part of the -- they're sent by the administration of the pope for the missions who have OK'd and then not OK'd and then OK'd again the idea that in China, you could be culturally Chinese and religiously Catholic. And they are given the same instructions for the Kongo. So they go to the Kongo with the instructions of the Kongolese are culturally Kongolese and they are Catholic also. And you need to accept that up to the moment where orthodoxy is threatened. And so, the Capuchin sent back to Rome their doubts, a set of questions saying, "So, how do we feel about this? How do we feel about that?" And this is very rich, obviously, documentation for us to see that relationship and also historically to see the evolution of that discourse from the mid-17th century to the early 19th century that is running parallel to the rise of the slave trade. And by the early 19th century, it's a completely different rhetoric that is in place. And that is also one of the very important aspect of that period and studying it. Thank you.

Audience Member: That anticipates my question. You asked -- you mentioned the slave trade and you mentioned that a couple of these images refer to that. You showed very clearly that there is this

mutual respect and dialogue between cultures. So, how are those things reconciled or juxtaposed in this context? Could you say a little more about that?

Dr Cécile Fromont: Yes. Thank you about that. I mean, that's one of the great conundrums of trying to understand the slave trade and its implementation is that there is a set of cultural, political and ideological mechanisms that are being put in place during that period so that captives who are people, as they are captured on the African continent becomes slaves at a certain moment of the process. And in the case of the Capuchin story, the captives become slaves once they are captured by slave-trader on land and they are very clearly already considered by them as slaves on the ships. Because at that time, to travel to and from Angola, the only way you are going to do that is on slave ships. And the Capuchins are giving description of the slave ships and they are horrified in aggregates, right, about what is going on. But what is mind-boggling for the historian and really for the human reading those sources is that as much as they are endeavoring in Central Africa in their apostolic work among people, once they are on the ship, they are unable to recognize those people as the same individuals. And it's really something that is quite striking and, you know, really is at the edge of what we understand as scholars about the involvement of the Catholic Church in the slave trade about the interactions between missionization and enslavement. And it is the same period where on the other side of the Atlantic, missionaries are converting the recently arrived enslaved men and women before they are resold into their final destination. And of course, the people who came from the Kongo were already Christian before they arrived. But that is difficult -- we've difficulty recognized except for the interpreters that the missionaries on the American coast are using to convert and tell the sermons that they're telling, etcetera. So, that's another instance in which you have kind of that double invisibility, right? There is invisibility in the documents of the time that do not talk about the process in this way on the part of the missionary. And then, there is another one that is on us as interpreters, an invisibility that we have not been able to look at these documents and see those moments and really build the tools to bring them to the fore. And that's the edge of where the research is and that's very important and difficult work there, too. Thank you.

Audience Member: Thank you so much. I thought that was absolutely fascinating and I was provoked in all the best ways, in particular by your -- the possibilities of this method beyond your own field. I'm a modernist so, you know, we're freighted by issues of authorship and the sort of -- the alternatives have been equally violent, not equally necessarily, but have been also violent in terms of erasure and such. So I'm just wondering if you can maybe speculate or maybe share, I'm sure you've had conversations with colleagues in other fields about the possibilities of such a method of a different conception of authorship through encounter that maybe are beyond your own field that you could maybe, again, speculate on either from your own interests or maybe share some of the conversations you've had about the possibilities of this method beyond the early modern fields.

Dr Cécile Fromont: Yes, thank you about that. I mean, there is something that's kind of ironic with that proposition is that in a way, the more you know about that inception, that moment, the less it is intuitively interesting to think about it in terms of authorship because there is a range of other kinds of questions that then, you know, you can ask about, you know, the process of the image coming into view. I would say that one of the aspects that I find interesting and it's slightly going in a different direction is the ways in which the fields that are outside of the fields for which the

methods of art history have been created are full of these moments, these challenges, right, to the methods that then we can, you know, bring back to the core. And one of the ways in which I got into that particular methodology is thinking back about my training as an African art historian. And, you know, there's a lot of questions we don't ask because it is not the most interesting question you can bring to a particular set of objects. And authorship is often one of them. And it's partly because of the nature of the archive, etcetera, but partly because, you know, it is not the core there. And so I wonder, too, with you about what we can do once we bring back that question to other places. And I would love to hear what you think of possibilities. I think, to now answer your question, I think photography is a great and an obvious, maybe the most clear application of the encounter as author, right? And it's going -- but it's going more into the death of the author direction too. So, that's really intriguing and exciting to think about. Thank you.

Dr Suzanne van der Meerendonk: All right. Thanks, everyone, so much. I think that's it for our time for questions. I want to invite everyone to give another warm thanks to our speaker today.

Dr Cécile Fromont: Thank you.

Dr Suzanne van der Meerendonk: And before we disperse for drinks and snacks in the lobby, I also just quickly wanted to remind everyone of our upcoming exhibition celebration at Agnes that will be happening on the 1st of December which will be our final constellation of exhibitions at our current building. And it is of sorts a Love Letter to Kingston with several shows of local artists. So, that's on December 1st. There will be an opening for members from 5:00 to 6:00 followed by a public reception from 6:00 to 8:00. So, if this is something you've been thinking about, this would be a great time to become a member. We'll do, you know, a walkthrough with curators and artists. And especially now that we are closing for our new building project and we'll be moving to all sorts of interesting activities offsite, it will be a great way of keeping in touch with us. So, if that's something you're interested in, please find my colleague, Kealy, in the lobby so she can answer all your questions about membership. And yeah, thank you all so much for coming out. Have a lovely rest of your evening. Thank you.

[Applause]