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The inauguration of artist Koen Vanmechelen's installation Collective Memory

*"The inauguration of Belgian artist Koen Vanmechelen's installation **Collective Memory** on June 9 in Venice is a symbol of hope in times when democracy is under stress and human rights under attack", says Manfred Nowak, Secretary General of the European Inter-University Centre for Human Rights and Democratisation ([EIUC](#)).*

With **Collective Memory**, Vanmechelen honours the importance of human rights and democracy at the heart of one of the most significant global institution in education. The European Inter-University Centre for Human Rights (EIUC) consolidates the values of the European Union and United Nations with the objective of strengthening democracy whilst establishing a world whom respects civil rights and equal opportunities for all. The sculpture consists of an ancient Greek statue of a child sitting on the Encyclopaedia of Human Rights staring pensively in front of him. **Koen Vanmechelen** explains: *"The books, our collective memory, allow the child to sit comfortably upright and hold the promise that one day it will be able to stand on it and reach for the sky. The column of books is incomplete but growing steadily; it is the first stage in the political model that is heavily under pressure but is the only way out of the morass of history: democracy. Its final claim is that every new-born has the right to a life worth living with respect for human rights."*

The EIUC sees its core business embodied by Vanmechelen's installation. Secretary General **Manfred Nowak** : *"In times when democracy is under stress and human rights under attack, Vanmechelen's sculpture is creating hope. Universal human rights, based on the equal dignity of every human being on our planet, is the strongest means of empowerment which humanity has ever created. The European Inter-University Centre for Human Rights and Democratisation and the Global Campus of Human Rights will benefit from Vanmechelen's sculpture as a source of inspiration to continue our efforts of spreading the message and culture of human rights and democracy to every corner of our*

globe."

For the artist, the EIUC provides the perfect home for his work. Vanmechelen: *"I am honoured to have the sculpture at the EIUC. They fight for the freedom of thought, relentlessly. They keep it on the global agenda, work tirelessly to give it substance and reality. They have the courage to see the many injustices for which we so often choose to close our eyes. They look out for the survival of the other. For me, this is probably the most beautiful manifestation of diversity."*

The Collaboration

The Koen Vanmechelen's installation Collective Memory is inaugurated during the opening of the 2017 [Venice School of Human Rights](#) and Democratisation and is part of **'HumanRightStress'**. This collaboration between EIUC and Fondazione Berengo emphasises art as a visual hyperbole for the global public about the significance of human rights and democracy, showcasing acclaimed artists **Ai Weiwei**, **Vik Muniz** and **Koen Vanmechelen**. The HumanRightStress calendar started with the [GLASSTRESS 2017](#) exhibition at the Biennial of Venice with Vanmechelen's thought-provoking 12m high Protected Paradise installation as a focal point.