

## Kunsthaus Bregenz

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Austria



Bregenz, June 2023

### **Invitation to the Press Conference**

Dear media representatives ,

We look forward to welcoming you to  
the press conference for the exhibition

KUB 2023.03

**Michael Armitage**

**Pathos and the Twilight of the Idle**

15 | 07 – 29 | 10 | 2023

**on Thursday, July 13, 2023, 11 am**

at Kunsthhaus Bregenz.

The exhibition can be visited before the  
press tour starting at 10 am.

Michael Armitage will be present.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Martina Feurstein'.

Martina Feurstein

Head of Communications & Fundraising

Kunsthhaus Bregenz

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Austria



KUB 2023.03 | Press Release

# Michael Armitage

## Pathos and the Twilight of the Idle

15 | 07 – 29 | 10 | 2023

### Press Conference

Thursday, July 13, 2023 at 11 am

### Opening

Friday, July 14, 2023 at 7 pm

### Press photos for download

[www.kunsthhaus-bregenz.at](http://www.kunsthhaus-bregenz.at)



Michael Armitage is one of the most important painters of the present day. He gained recognition with large-scale paintings that depict figures in somnambulist landscapes. In them, paint is applied in several layers, scraped off, and reworked anew. Armitage's motifs are marked by history and current political events. He studies local rituals and political demonstrations, in addition to plant and animal life. Velvety on the surface and awash with formal beauty, his pictures possess an unsettling ambiguity.

One special feature of his paintings is the image carrier. Armitage uses bark cloth as a painting ground. To make it, the outer layer of bark from the Ugandan ficus tree is peeled off, lightly burned, and beaten smooth. In a complex process, the hard organic material is transformed into a supple, tensile cloth referred to as "Lubugo." Armitage stitches pieces of the cloth together into substantial sizes. The seams remain visible underneath the paint layer; holes and irregularities also become part of the image.

*Pathos and the twilight of the idle* is the title of one of the artist's works from 2019. It is a vertical-format painting of considerable size. In the center of the image is a figure that strides toward the viewer. His facial expression and hunched shoulders convey a certain readiness to accuse and fight. Attached to his chest and waist are two cans of tear gas. In his hands, which have strangely multiplied, he holds sand-colored slings. In the background, countless colors mushroom into one another. The artist created the painting after seeing a demonstration by Kenya's largest opposition party in Nairobi in 2017. Several of the depicted demonstrators are dressed in a grotesque manner, donning costumes, wigs, or crowns. One person waves a flag. The muscular figure in the upper center wears a bikini top.

The British-Kenyan painter has said that he is more interested in people than in their leaders. In addition to current political topics, Armitage is also interested in forms of traditional religious imagery. The baldachin in the upper portion of the painting is reminiscent of an altar. In fact, the man laid out in the upper center of the picture is

modeled on Hans Holbein's *The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb*, 1521–22.

Armitage's paintings are intensely colorful, rampant, and moving. Events and imaginings are woven together into rich narratives. Traditional motifs from European painting enter into the scenes, creating instances of déjà vu. Édouard Manet, Francisco de Goya, the Fauves, as well as R. B. Kitaj, Egon Schiele, and Paul Gauguin are recognizable in formal elements and the choice of colors.



In another large-scale picture, *The Fourth Estate*, 2017, the political demonstration – which took place in September 2017 is likewise depicted. Several of the demonstrators have climbed onto a tree. They are sitting on a branch fork as if in a nest. Visible in the background are palm trees and the Nairobi skyline. Although photographs served as the basis for the painting, surreal elements – like the toad on the flag – and once again references to Western art history come into play. Francisco de Goya likewise depicted a group of people sitting on a branch. His print is titled *Ridiculous Folly*, 1815–19.

Armitage's painting takes its vitality from complementary colors – such as yellow and purple or salmon pink and green – and from its break with established ways of seeing. He depicts people close to the picture edge or from below. The inversion of perspective implies a reversal in the balance of power. The painter also gains motivation for his works from pictures and videos that he encounters on social media. Time and again, people are publicly condemned because of perceived weaknesses. One moving example is the case of the Kenyan boxer Conjestina Achieng. After the end of her career, the several-time boxing champion suffered from psychological problems. In *Conjestina*, 2017, Armitage shows the boxer naked and exposed. This is one way, the artist explains, to remind us of her vulnerability and represent the collective defamation that suspected her of embodying a malicious spirit.

The exhibition *Michael Armitage – Pathos and the Twilight of the Idle* at Kunsthaus Bregenz is the first comprehensive presentation of the British-Kenyan painter's work in Austria.

Thomas D. Trummer

Biography

**Michael Armitage**



Michael Armitage (b. 1984 Nairobi) lives in Nairobi and in Bali. In 2020 he founded the Nairobi Contemporary Art Institute (NCAI) – a non-profit organization dedicated to providing space for art in Nairobi and promoting and supporting contemporary art in East Africa. Armitage has had solo exhibitions at institutions such as MoMA in New York (2019–20), the Norval Foundation in Cape Town (2020), the Haus der Kunst in Munich (2020–21), the Royal Academy of Arts in London (2021), the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen (2021), and the Kunsthalle Basel (2022). Group shows have taken him to the 2019 Venice Biennale, to the 2015 Lyon Biennale, and to the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh in 2018.

KUB Billboards

**Michael Armitage**

15 | 07 – 29 | 10 | 2023



The KUB billboards located on Seestraße, the main thoroughfare in Bregenz, are an integral part of Kunsthaus Bregenz's program, extending each KUB exhibition into public space.

Excerpts of Michael Armitage's impressive paintings can also be admired in Bregenz's urban space during the summer months.

KUB Collection

**Anna Jermolaewa**

15 | 07 - 29 | 10 | 2023



Over the summer months, Kunsthaus Bregenz is presenting works by Anna Jermolaewa on the ground floor. KUB is closely associated with the artist–Austria’s next Venice Biennale participant–as several of her main works are part of the Kunsthaus Bregenz collection. In the exhibition in Bregenz, Jermolaewa will show her highly topical installation *Chernobyl Safari*, from 2014/21/23, *Famous Pigeons*, from 2021, and her installation *Dining Room*, from 2017, which will be on view in Austria for the first time.

Jermolaewa, who came to Austria as a Russian dissident in 1989, explores political history and present in her diverse work. Her political commentary is as astute as it is humorous.

**Preview & Artist Talk with Anna Jermolaewa**

**Monday, July 10, 6.30 pm**

The exhibition will be open generally beginning July 15.

**From July 24 to August 27, 9 pm to midnight each evening, clips from *Chernobyl Safari* will be projected on the screen at Karl-Tizian-Platz.**

Biography

**Anna Jermolaewa**

Anna Jermolaewa (b. 1970, Saint Petersburg) lives and works in Vienna and Upper Austria. As a co-founder of the first opposition party in the Soviet Union and a co-publisher of its government-critical newspaper, she fled from the Soviet Union to Austria in 1989. Since 2019 she has been professor for experimental design at the University of Arts Linz. Jermolaewa has shown her work in solo exhibitions, including at the Schlossmuseum Linz in 2022–23 and at the MAK Wien in 2022. In 2022 the City of Vienna artist awarded the artist the Dr. Karl Renner Prize from for her social commitment as a member of the association “Ariadne: Wir Flüchtlinge für Österreich” (“Ariadne: We Refugees for Austria”). Jermolaewa will represent Austria at the Venice Biennale in 2024.

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