

SLG

PRESS RELEASE

MICHAEL ARMITAGE: THE CHAPEL

13 DEC 2017– 23 FEB 2018, MAIN GALLERY, ADMISSION FREE



Michael Armitage, *Exorcism*, 2017, © Michael Armitage. Photo © White Cube (Ben Westoby)

The Chapel is London-based, Kenyan-born artist **Michael Armitage**'s first major solo show in a public sector gallery in London. A new series of large-scale paintings, made with the chapel-like qualities of the SLG's main space in mind, explore the ambiguous boundaries between religion, folklore and social consensus, particularly in relation to issues of mental health in East Africa. Drawing on historical and contemporary news stories, socio-political issues and the artist's own experiences of Kenya, the works blend dream-like figuration with compositional references to Titian, Gauguin and other masters of Western art history. Painted in layers on Ugandan lubugo bark cloth, the texture and ruptures within this distinctive material are integrated into Armitage's surreal imagery, the seductive colours and surface beauty of which belie the disturbing subject matter upon which it is based.

Conjestina, 2017, depicts former world middleweight boxing champion, Conjestina Achieng, as a naked, boxing-gloved figure attended to by animalistic nuns while a pair of copulating baboons carry on regardless in the background. This bizarre and disturbing composition can be read as a critique of the questionable nature of the Kenyan popular media's documentation of Conjestina's situation, exposing deeply personal and vulnerable moments of instability but with little clarity as to whether the help offered to her on camera is genuinely for her well-being or merely a crass form of entertainment.

This sense of ambiguity characterises another work, *Exorcism*, 2017, in which Armitage portrays a ritual he observed through online documentation of a ceremony for which women gather to be publically exorcised. In his painterly translation of the event, its true origins are intentionally obscured so that the atmosphere could as easily be read as being celebratory as that of a ritualistic ousting of the devil.

The Flaying of Marsyas, 2017, takes its title from Titian's masterpiece of the same name, as well as borrowing from its composition and dark subject matter whereby Marsyas, a centurion like satyr from Greek mythology, is killed by flaying. Armitage's equally chilling work portrays a contemporary scene in which a figure tied to a tree is surrounded by a group of spectators. Through these beautiful but deeply unsettling paintings, Armitage attempts to both locate and destabilise his subject matter, harnessing the tensions in his works through tableaux of bewildering social interactions which ask of the viewer *what is comfortable*, while simultaneously addressing questions of exoticism and 'otherness' through their implication of the viewers as voyeurs.

Michael Armitage: The Chapel is accompanied by a publication with essays by Mukami Kuria and Roger Malbert, and a conversation between Michael Armitage and SLG director, Margot Heller.

For further information and high resolution images please contact: **Janette Scott, Head of Communications** on **020 7703 6120** or email **Janette@southlondongallery.org**
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(not for publication)

NOTES TO EDITORS

About Michael Armitage

Michael Armitage received his BA in Fine Art from the Slade School of Fine Art 2007 and has a Postgraduate Diploma from the Royal Academy Schools 2010. Recent solo exhibitions include *Peace Coma*, Turner Contemporary, Margate; *Strange Fruit*, White Cube, Hong Kong, (both 2017) and *Michael Armitage/ MATRIX 263*, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (2016). Group exhibitions include; Drawing Biennial, London (2017); *Imitation of Life: Melodrama and Race in the 21st Century*, HOME, Manchester, 2016; *La vie Moderne*, La 13th Biennale de Lyon, Lyon; *I am because of you*, Yuan Museum, Beijing, (all 2015); *100 Painters of Tomorrow*, Beers Contemporary, London (2014); *Tomorrow : London*, South London Gallery (2014) ; *Connecting Worlds*, UBM, London (2013); *Myth and Market* (with John Tiney); *Studio 1 :1*, London (2013) ; Drawing Biennial 2013, Drawing Room, London (2013); RA Schools Show, Royal Academy Schools Studios, London (2010).

About the South London Gallery

The South London Gallery (SLG) is internationally renowned for its programme of contemporary art exhibitions, film and performance events, with integrated education projects for children, young people and adults. Over the past decade the exhibitions programme has featured solo shows by established international figures such as Katharina Grosse, Ellen Gallagher, Thomas Hirschhorn, Rashid Johnson, Gabriel Kuri, Rivane Neuenschwander, Roman Ondak, Amie Siegel, Erik van Lieshout and Lawrence Weiner, as well as those by younger and mid-career artists such as Alice Channer, Michael Dean, Thea Djordjadze, Ryan Gander and Oscar Murillo. Group shows bring together works by established and lesser-known British and international artists, whilst an ongoing residency programme provides opportunities for artists to develop a new body of work and exhibit at the SLG.

Next year the South London Gallery will be expanding into the former Peckham Road Fire Station and is currently fundraising to enable its renovation and transformation into a cultural centre which will be an annexe to the SLG's main site. The new gallery, archive and cultural centre will open to the public in 2018. The Grade II listed building, dating from 1867, was generously

donated to the SLG to respond to the pressing need to expand its programmes, impact and long term sustainability. The project has been awarded a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant of £1,650,000 thanks to National Lottery players. The £4m project has also received a substantial grant from the Mayor's London Regeneration Fund as well as funding from a number of trusts, foundations, individuals and commercial galleries to raise a total of £3.6m. The gallery is now embarking on the final stage of its fundraising campaign to secure the final £400,000 to cover restoration costs and establish a fund for the future running of the building.

Opening Hours

The gallery is open Tuesday–Sunday 11–6pm, except Wednesdays and the last Friday of the month until 9pm. Closed Mondays. Admission is free.

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