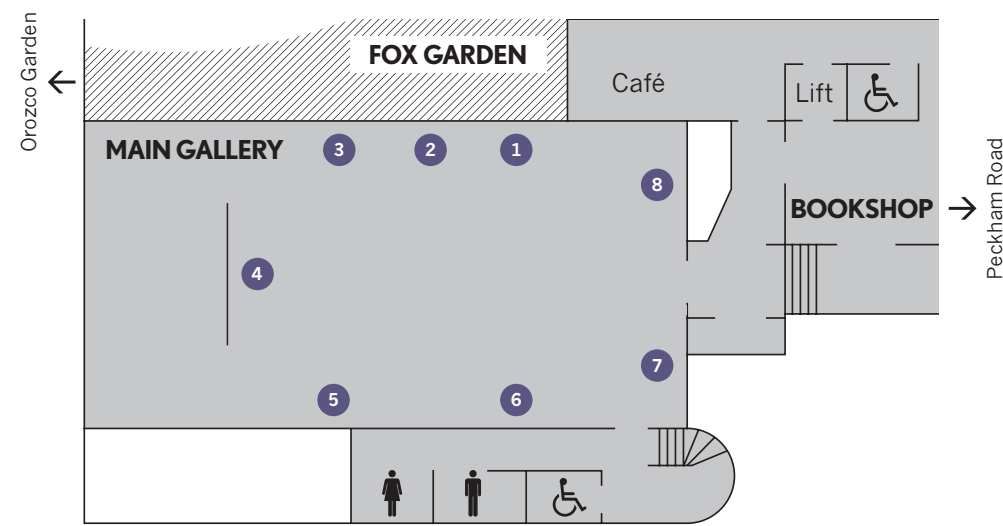


GALLERY MAP



1.
hope, 2017
Oil on lubugo bark cloth
220.5 × 170.5 × 4cm

2.
Conjestina, 2017
Oil on lubugo bark cloth
220.4 × 170.4 × 4cm

3.
Nyayo, 2017
Oil on lubugo bark cloth
220.5 × 170.5 × 4cm

4.
The Flaying of Marsyas, 2017
Oil on lubugo bark cloth
235 × 246 × 4cm

5.
Lacuna, 2017
Oil on lubugo bark cloth
300 × 150 × 4cm

6.
Exorcism, 2017
Oil on lubugo bark cloth
200 × 330 × 4cm

7.
seraph, 2017
Oil on lubugo bark cloth
150 × 200 cm × 4cm

8.
Anthill, 2017
Oil on lubugo bark cloth
140 × 130 × 4cm

ACCOMPANYING EVENTS

Michael Armitage in Conversation
Tue 12 Dec, 5pm, £5/£3 Conc,
Main Gallery
Michael Armitage discusses his practice in conversation with art historian and curator Sandhini Poddar

Film Screening: Kati Kati
Wed 31 Jan, 7pm, £5/£3 Conc,
Clore Studio
Michael Armitage selects *Kati Kati*, (2016) by Mbithi Masya to accompany his exhibition. This surreal and touching film follows a young woman with no memory of her life or death, who is helped to the afterlife by a ghost at the lodge of Kati Kati.

Exhibition Tours
Daily, 1pm & Last Fridays, 7pm, Free
Join the SLG’s gallery assistants for an informal, drop-in tour of the current exhibitions.
Booking for most events is essential, book on our website or call 020 7703 6120

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This gallery guide is printed on recycled paper.

MICHAEL ARMITAGE:
THE CHAPEL



Michael Armitage, *seraph*, 2017. © Michael Armitage. Photo © White Cube (Ben Westoby). Courtesy of the Artist and White Cube.

MICHAEL ARMITAGE: THE CHAPEL
13 DEC 2017 – 23 FEB 2018

The Chapel is London-based, Kenyan-born artist Michael Armitage’s first major solo show in a public gallery in London. A new series of eight 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. 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 viewer as voyeur.

- 1. *hope*, 2017**
Oil on lubugo bark cloth
220.5 × 170.5 × 4cm

The surreal and disconcerting composition of *hope*, 2017 focuses on the extraordinary sight of a woman who has just given birth to a donkey. Armitage uses this disarming image as a provocation to question the impossibility, in East Africa, for one generation of farm labourers to the next, to secure more lucrative forms of employment.
- 2. *Conjestina*, 2017**
Oil on lubugo bark cloth
220.4 × 170.4 × 4cm

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 Kenyan popular media’s documentation of Achieng’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. The composition is based on Antoine Watteau’s painting of Pierrot, drawing a parallel with the trusting fool who is punished for his naivety by friendly-faced tormentors.

- 3. *Nyayo*, 2017**
Oil on lubugo bark cloth
220.5 × 170.5 × 4cm

Nyayo, 2017, meaning footsteps, centres on an aerial view of a naked man with a snake wrapped around his leg, overlooked by four standing figures. The painting refers to the throwing of toothless snakes into political prisoners’ cells in Nyayo House, Nairobi during the Moi era of the 1990s. Shown together, the almost life-size figures of *Nyayo*, *hope* and *Conjestina*, and the scenes surrounding them, begin to emulate stained glass tableaux of saints.
- 4. *The Flaying of Marsyas*, 2017**
Oil on lubugo bark cloth
235 × 246 × 4cm

The Flaying of Marsyas, 2017, takes its title from Greek mythology whilst borrowing from the composition and dark subject matter of Titian’s masterpiece of the same name whereby Marsyas, a satyr, loses a bet with Apollo and as a consequence is killed by flaying. Armitage’s equally chilling work portrays a contemporary scene in which a figure tied to a tree is surrounded by his tormentors. Armitage’s works often deal with violence, highlighting injustices in East Africa, raising awareness of current affairs whilst simultaneously repositioning the figure of the victim. The choice to translate this famously cruel image of Marsyas, however, holds a mirror up to narratives that position European history as the site of civility.

- 5. *Lacuna*, 2017**
Oil on lubugo bark cloth
300 × 150 × 4cm

In *Lacuna*, 2017, land and sky collide amidst creeping images of lizards, unfathomable figures and the outlines of faces. The burning canoe in the foreground is less sinister than it at first appears, having in fact been set alight as part of the process of being waterproofed. No single motif dominates, with equal detail and depth being given to each and a flattening of the images creating a seductive yet disorientating effect.
- 6. *Exorcism*, 2017**
Oil on lubugo bark cloth
200 × 330 × 4cm

In *Exorcism*, 2017, Armitage portrays a ritual in Tanzania that 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 either celebratory or a ritualistic ousting of the devil. The composition draws on *Music in the Tuileries Gardens* by Édouard Manet and *Young Spartans Exercising* by Edgar Degas.
- 7. *seraph*, 2017**
Oil on lubugo bark cloth
150 × 200 cm × 4cm

Woven into this painting of lush forestry and undergrowth, the four flower-like motifs are the angelic beings, or seraph, from which the work takes its name.

- 8. *Anthill*, 2017**
Oil on lubugo bark cloth
140 × 130 × 4cm

Anthill, 2017, is based on descriptions of possessed women in Tanzania that often feature images of witches who take flight from termite hills on the backs of hyenas. Using the undulations of the cloth to define the hill, Armitage integrated the natural texture of the lubugo bark cloth into the composition. The cloth itself is a material harvested from ‘mutuba’ trees (*ficus natalensis*) in Uganda. Produced by the Buganda, the largest tribe in Uganda, the technique has been passed down from generation to generation and has changed very little since its inception. The cloth has great cultural significance and is still used in tribal ceremonies and as burial shrouds, but some of this meaning has been lost by its common use as a tourist trinket.
- A publication to accompany the exhibition is available from the SLG bookshop, priced £25.

Exorcism courtesy of the artist and the Harry and Lana David Collection.
- #MichaelArmitage
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I @SouthLondonGallery
F South London Gallery

Artist’s Biography
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; *Prospect 4: The Lotus in Spite of the Swamp*, Prospect Triennial, New Orleans; *NOW*, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, Drawing Biennial, Drawing Room, London (all 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*, SLG (2014); *Connecting Worlds*, UBM, London (2013); *Myth and Market* (with John Tiney); *Studio 1:1*, London (2013); Drawing Biennial 2013, Drawing Room, London (2013); and RA Schools Show, Royal Academy Schools Studios, London (2010).