

Projects

110

Michael Armitage

Projects 110: Michael Armitage presents eight paintings that, in the artist's words, explore "parallel cultural histories." Here, as in his work more widely, Armitage puts contemporary visual culture in dialogue with art history and the legacy of modernism as it veers toward—and breaks from—the West. Born in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1984, Armitage received his artistic training in London. Today, he travels between London and Nairobi, citing each city as crucial to his creative practice.

Armitage draws inspiration from both European avant-garde artists and East African modernists such as Meek Gichugu (b. 1932, Ngecha, Kenya), Chelenge (b. 1961, Kericho, Kenya), and Jak Katarikawe (c. 1938–2018, Kampala, Uganda). The pull of East African culture is evident not only in Armitage's visual vocabulary but in his use of *lubugo*, a fabric made from fig-tree bark, in lieu of canvas as a support for his paintings. First encountered by the artist in a Nairobi tourist market in 2010, the cloth is Ugandan in origin. In this mix of materials and cultural influences, Armitage celebrates a living lineage of narrative, abstraction, and color, creating an homage to the rich and complicated history of painting.

Across this body of work, the artist oscillates between the real and the surreal, the celebratory and the sinister. He merges memories of Kenya with media depictions of East Africa, entangling the personal and the everyday in a web of social and political tensions. Through these compositions, Armitage considers how political reportage, African bodies, and the body politic circulate within systems of global capital, highlighting the fraught relationship between Africa and the West.

Projects 110: Michael Armitage is organized by Thelma Golden, Director and Chief Curator, The Studio Museum in Harlem, with Legacy Russell, Associate Curator, The Studio Museum in Harlem.

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