

29 March 2026 - 10 January 2027

# ACCESSIBLE VISIT

Visit the exhibitions «Michael Armitage. The Promise of Change» e «Amar Kanwar. Co-Travellers» at Palazzo Grassi with this booklet in Simple English and the videos in International Sign Language (IS).

Palazzo Grassi  
Punta della Dogana  
**Pinault  
Collection**

Further information: [education@palazzograssi.it](mailto:education@palazzograssi.it)

# MICHAEL ARMITAGE. THE PROMISE OF CHANGE

Michael Armitage is an artist born in Kenya.

He studied in England and now divides his life between Kenya and Indonesia. You will notice the influence of all these places in his works and in the way they are painted.

Armitage does not paint on canvas, but instead uses lubugo.

Lubugo is a fabric made by stripping the bark from the mutuba tree and then beating it until it becomes soft. You can see how this process works in the video on the first floor.

Lubugo is produced in the equatorial belt of the planet. Armitage chooses to use it in order to distance himself from the traditional canvas of Western painting.

The title of the exhibition is The Promise of Change.

You will see large paintings rich in references: the artist draws inspiration from current events, but also from literature, art history, cinema, and nature.



[Watch the video in International Sign](#)

# CURFEW

The painting portrays a moment of panic during the COVID-19 period.

At the port of Likoni, people crowded together trying to leave before the lockdown were hit by tear gas: the painting recounts moments of fear and confusion.

Take a moment to observe the work in its details.

You will notice that the artist uses reverse perspective: elements in the foreground are small, while those further away are enlarged. This is the opposite of traditional perspective and intensifies the sense of confusion of the scene.

Take the time you need to observe the painting carefully: there are many overlapping layers, and something is happening in each of them. Patience is required to discover everything.

# NYALI BEACH BOYS

This room focuses on queer themes.

The naked young men depicted are boys who, on Nyali Beach in Kenya, sell their bodies to tourists in order to survive.

The scale of the painting and its composition refer to *Les Femmes d'Alger* by Pablo Picasso, a canonical painting that deals with female prostitution.

Armitage refers to Picasso while addressing the theme of male prostitution, which is far less represented than female prostitution.

The work *Kampala Suburb*, depicting two young men kissing, refers to Ugandan laws that violently discriminate homosexual people. Look at the frieze in the background to understand what is hidden.

# EUROPA

Part of the exhibition addresses migration. Look closely at the painting *Europa*, which portrays a tired, pregnant woman sitting on the ground.

In Greek mythology, Europa is a Phoenician princess who is abducted by Zeus—transformed into a bull—and taken to the island of Crete as a prisoner.

Can you identify any references to the myth in the painting?

Armitage also engages with other myths in his work: in addition to *Europa*, you will find references to *Midas* and *Antigone*.

Armitage's *Europa* is a contemporary version of the classical myth. It refers to the hardships and sacrifices endured by those who migrate due to poverty, wars, and environmental crises.

The dangers of these journeys in search of change are depicted in the large paintings on the first floor, which recall the tragedy that occurred in the waters of Lampedusa in 2013.

# THE PROMISE OF CHANGE

By observing the painting *The Promise of Change*, we enter yet another context: Armitage documents the relationship between the people and political power.

The faces of the crowd are indistinguishable; they become a single, uncontrollable mass.

The leader is depicted as a toad, signaling his moral baseness.

Another painting representing a critical situation is *Dandora*, which depicts an open-air landfill near Nairobi.

Among the rubbish, a seated man plays a musical instrument. The instrument is called a xalam, and the figure is inspired by a scene from the film *Xala* by director Ousmane Sembène.

The film tells the story of a group of people with disabilities who first live on the streets and later in the landfill, where they are pushed by urban policies.

In this case as well, the work initially appears dreamlike; only upon closer inspection does its true nature become visible.

# SAYAN

The final section of the exhibition is dedicated to landscapes and nature. We find scenes depicting the vegetation of Kenya and Indonesia.

The landscapes of these places, which are part of Armitage's life, function like characters in his works: lush, spiritual nature inhabits the scene alongside human figures and animals.

There is a blend of paradisiacal and spiritual settings combined with grotesque scenes.

Let us observe together the painting *Sayan*.

Armitage highlights the seams of the lubugo with purple paint, turning them into a compositional element of the work.

Red lines define the human figures, shown from multiple points of view. A few minutes of careful attention are needed to grasp all the elements of the composition.

# AMAR KANWAR. CO-TRAVELLERS

The next galleries present works by Amar Kanwar.

Amar Kanwar is an Indian artist who works with archival images and video.

Here you will find a small book. The first page of the book reproduces statements issued by the military dictatorship of Myanmar.

With this book, Kanwar wants to commemorate a Burmese bookseller who, in his shop, tore out all the first pages of books: he wanted to silence the voice of the dictatorship printed in them.

The videos show fragments of documentaries and archival photographs, which the artist has combined in order to tell stories.

The first video shows people who fled from Myanmar to the United States.

The second video shows people who are still living in Myanmar.

The third video presents images of the military government, alongside pages from books and poetry.



[Watch the video in International Sign](#)

# THE PEACOCK'S GRAVEYARD

In the room behind the velvet curtains there is a video installation.

It lasts 26 minutes and is titled *The Peacock's Graveyard*.

The peacock is an animal that, in many cultures, symbolizes immortality.

In this work, Kanwar brings together stories of different people, each with its own moral lesson.

There is an overbearing priest, two quarrelling friends, a landowner, an executioner, and a president who is reincarnated as a pomegranate.