

Michael Kvium

The Danish artist Michael Kvium (b.1955) was born and raised in Horsens. He started his artistic career as an illustrator for the local newspaper Horsens Folkeblad, where he spent six years. After that, he went and got a degree from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen in the years 1979-1985. Michael Kvium got his artistic breakthrough in the mid-1980.

With this exhibition, we present an assembly of iconic pieces by Michael Kvium from the collection including *Selvportræt*, *Maleriets rum* og *Guds Krigslist*. Michael Kvium is known for confronting his audience with the very thing we wish to suppress. His art revolves around the fundamental conditions of existence for the individual. The thematic content and recurring subjects often originate from opposing entities such as the abhorrent and the alluring, order and chaos, reality and fantasy, life and death. Several iconographic symbols also reappear in many of Michael Kvium's works: the lemon, the skull, cerebral substance and the symbol of the blind.

Horsens Kunstmuseum has followed and supported Michael Kvium's artistic career since his breakthrough in the mid-1980. Today, the museum has the largest collection of his works in the country, spanning over paintings, drawings, graphics and sculptures created between the years 1985-2014.

Below, you can read about three selected artworks by Michael Kvium from the collection.



Selvportræt (1985). Oil on canvas. 130,5 x 200,4 cm.

Selvportræt

In 1985 *Selvportræt* (“self-portrait”) became the first work by Michael Kvium to be incorporated into the collection of Horsens Art Museum. *Selvportræt* holds a central place in Michael Kvium’s production, as it reflects the first major shift in his artistic career. In the early 1980s, Michael Kvium was heavily involved in motorcycles and the lifestyle that revolved around this interest. His early work often revolved around the motorcycle culture, frequently painted in a photorealistic style. *Selvportræt* is almost symbolically painted over a motorcycle image.

In the painting, a man (according to the title, the artist himself) stands and gazes out of an open window. On the wall of the sparsely decorated room, the man’s shadow is depicted, seemingly living its own independent life. Both the open window and the shadow symbolically emphasize a form of psychological division. Thematically, the work thus revolves around the repressed and suppressed aspects of human existence. This is characteristic of Michael Kvium, whose works often explore the repressed facets of life.

Guds Krigslist

In the monumental work *Guds Krigslist* ("God's stratagem"), ten naked and bald female creatures come walking in a group. They are depicted in an almost animalistic manner and appear far from idealized with their grotesque bodies. On their shoulders, they carry their offspring, infants, each of which carries silver platters with fruit on their heads. We find ourselves in an indefinable and dreamlike universe, evoking associations to a dark underworld or hell. On the floor, the women step on the scattered skulls in the picture space. They balance and move from skull to skull without touching the ground. Considering the title God's Stratagem, it is tempting to see these women as individuals fleeing from death. They are struggling for survival for themselves and their children.

The painting employs 'vanities symbols' in the form of fruit and skulls, a representation associated with the transience of life. The decorative painted framing of the work appears to consist of what resembles black cerebral substance or tangled organs, further emphasizing the motif and theme of body and death.



Guds Krigslist (1991). Oil on canvas. 275 x 400 cm.



Maleriets rum (1996-2001). Oil on canvas and cast iron.
Measurements when hung up: 238 x 600 cm.

Maleriets rum

In *Maleriets rum* (“the space of the painting”), Michael Kvium experiments with transcending the boundaries of the space of a painting. The work consists of four paintings with different planes that overlap each other. On the left side of the painting is a field of gray, on which black eggs are painted in an extremely realistic depiction. The eggs extend beyond the canvas, as three cast-iron eggs are mounted on the museum wall, physically extending beyond the painting’s space. In art history, the egg is associated with the cyclical and life-giving. However, by making the eggs black, Michael Kvium evokes a contradictory symbolism, associating the egg with both life and death.

Death also appears to be present, as on the right side of the work, a crippled, androgynous figure is seen, despite its fleshiness, wearing a death mask. Death is closely linked to life, a point that Michael Kvium reminds both himself and his audience of. On the largest canvas in *Maleriets rum*, the artist has also chosen to depict himself painting this figure of death with the color from the bucket that hangs on the paintbrush. Similar to *Selvportræt* from 1985, Michael Kvium also addresses the darker aspects of human nature, as a lifelike shadow with a turned head and a paintbrush in hand is centrally featured in the piece.