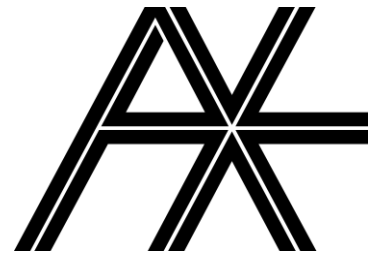


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## Stranger in the Village Reflecting on Racism with James Baldwin 3.9.2023 – 7.1.2024

**Media release**  
Aarau, June 2023

In his famous text *Stranger in the Village*, the US-American writer James Baldwin addressed the racism that informed his stay in Switzerland in the 1950s. Baldwin's words continue to inspire many artists to this day. They hold up a mirror to us as a society and have lost none of their incendiary effect. The group exhibition explores belonging and exclusion through current works by local and international artists, raising questions that concern us all.

The starting point for the exhibition *Stranger in the Village* is the eponymous text by the world-famous US-American author James Baldwin (1924-1987). In the early 1950s, Baldwin takes up residence for a few months in the Swiss mountain village of Leukerbad in the Valais. When he retreats there to write his debut novel, the residents greet him with "astonishment, curiosity, amusement, and outrage". He is considered a "living wonder" and called the "N-word". Baldwin realises that there are still regions in this world where a Black person is considered a discovery. He writes about this experience in his essay *Stranger in the Village*, which appears in *Harper's Magazine* in 1953. Baldwin analyses the everyday racism in the mountain village to arrive at more wide-ranging reflections on the topic in his home country, the United States. His text is a call to become aware of existing power structures and discriminatory prejudices and their destructive consequences.

How do we respond to Baldwin's words in Switzerland today? In a time of heightened awareness of social and structural injustices, the Aargauer Kunsthaus also intends to highlight issues of racism with art. The exhibition *Stranger in the Village* brings together numerous works of art from the middle of the 20th century to today, adopting an interdisciplinary, collaborative, and kaleidoscopic approach. At the very beginning of the exhibition, we encounter James Baldwin's voice in the 1962 film version of *Stranger in the Village* by Pierre Koralnik (\*1937). Quotes from the text serve as a leitmotif, organising the exhibition into various chapters, which present works by contemporary artists and current positions in dialogic ensembles, allowing them to form a connection.

Omar Ba (\*1977, Genf and Dakar) and Sasha Huber (\*1975, Finland, Switzerland and Haiti) have created new works, especially for this exhibition. Works by artists working in Switzerland, such as James Bantone, Denise Bertschi, and Ceylan Öztrük, as well as by internationally known artists like Kader Attia, Marlene Dumas, Glenn Ligon, and Carrie Mae Weems are also on display. Among the approximately forty artists assembled for this exhibition, there will also be new names to be discovered or rediscovered, such as the US-American Vincent O. Carter or the Congolese André M'Bon, who both worked in Switzerland for decades. At the centre of the exhibition, an interactive room provides visitors with several options to participate creatively and to engage more deeply with the topic of racism.

The exhibition was designed by a museum team that enjoys the privileges of the majority and never experienced racism directly. To enhance knowledge, dialogue, and diversity, the exhibition was supported by an "Advisory Board". This advisory committee consists of people from different areas of expertise and different backgrounds. They are connected in that they have devoted themselves to a more profound exploration of topics such as racial discrimination, exclusion, belonging, or decolonisation—always in relation to Switzerland. In preparation for the exhibition and beyond, the entire Aargauer Kunsthhaus team is receiving training from Estefania Cuero, diversity expert and coach, who was invited to lead anti-racism workshops with the entire Kunsthhaus team. This will help us understand that racism is not only an individual but also a structural matter. The question is not, "Am I racist?", but rather, "How can I become aware of my own racism?" The exhibition will conclude with a multitude of possible answers, always through the prism of art.

#### On James Baldwin

James Baldwin (New York 1924-1987 Saint-Paul-de-Vence), is one of the most important US-American writers of the 20th century who became well-known far beyond the United States. He is an icon of equality for all people.

## Artists in the Exhibition

Igshaan Adams  
(\*1982, Capetown. Lives in Capetown)  
Judith Albert  
(\*1969, Sarnen. Lives in Zürich)  
Joshua Amissah  
(\*1995, Winterthur. Lives in Berlin)  
Luc Andrié  
(\*1954, Pretoria. Lives in La Russille)  
Kader Attia  
(\*1970, Paris. Lives in Berlin and Paris)  
Maria Auxiliadora da Silva  
(Campo Belo 1935–1974 São Paulo)  
Omar Ba  
(\*1977, Dakar. Lives in Genf and Dakar)  
James Bantone  
(\*1992, Genf. Lives in Genf and Zürich)  
Sabian Baumann  
(\*1962, Zug. Lives in Zürich)  
Denise Bertschi  
(\*1983, Aarau. Lives in Zürich)  
Notta Caflisch  
(\*1979, Bern. Lives in Winterthur)  
Vincent O. Carter  
(Kansas City 1924–1983 Bern)  
Ishita Chakraborty  
(\*1989, Kolkata. Lives in Möriken)  
Marlene Dumas  
(\*1953, Capetown. Lives in Amsterdam)  
Tatjana Erpen  
(\*1980, Leuggern. Lives in Basel and Lucerne)  
Hanny Fries  
(Zürich 1918–2009 Zürich)  
Klaus Hennch  
(Mainz 1924–2005 Eglisau)  
Jonathan Horowitz  
(\*1966, New York. Lives in  
Los Angeles)  
Sasha Huber  
(\*1975, Uster. Lives in Helsinki)  
Hans Josephsohn  
(Kaliningrad 1920–2012 Zürich)

Laura Kingsley  
(\*1984, Ohio. Lives in Dübendorf)  
Vincent Kohler  
(\*1977, Nyon. Lives in Lausanne)  
Pierre Koralnik  
(\*1937, Paris. Lives in Zürich)  
Namsa Leuba  
(\*1982, La grande Béroche. Lives in Talence)  
Glenn Ligon  
(\*1960, New York. Lives in New York)  
André M'Bon  
(Beampo 1935–2019 Point-Noire)  
Gianni Motti  
(\*1958, Sondrio. Lives in Genf)  
Sirah Nying  
(\*1998, Zürich. Lives in Zürich)  
Senam Okudzeto  
(\*1972, Chicago. Lives in Basel)  
Uriel Orlow  
(\*1973, Zürich. Lives in Lissabon, London  
and Zürich)  
Frida Orupabo  
(\*1986, Sarpsborg. Lives in Oslo)  
Ceylan Öztrük  
(\*1984, Ankara. Lives in Zürich)  
Markus Raetz  
(Bern 1941–2020 Bern)  
Petri Saarikko (\*1973, Helsinki. Lives in  
Helsinki)  
Niki de Saint Phalle  
(Neuilly-sur-Seine 1930–2002 San Diego)  
Lorna Simpson  
(\*1960, New York. Lives in New York)  
Martine Syms  
(\*1988, Los Angeles. Lives in Los Angeles)  
Olga Titus  
(\*1977, Glarus. Lives in Winterthur)  
Carrie Mae Weems  
(\*1953, Portland. Lives in New York)

## Publication

*Stranger in the Village. Rassismus im Spiegel von James Baldwin / Le racisme au miroir de James Baldwin* (2024), German/French, publisher: Scheidegger & Spiess, graphics design: Bonbon, Zürich

A publication in German and French will be released to coincide with the closing ceremony of the exhibition and the centenary of James Baldwin's birth (1924-1987). Besides numerous images of the works, the catalogue contains a reprint of *Stranger in the Village* and a Graphic Novel by Melanie Grauer (illustrator, Zürich). Also included in the publication are a discussion between Sasha Huber, artist, and Dr. Céline Eidenbenz, curator, as well as essays and contributions for further reading by Dr. Rich Blint (scientist, author, curator, New York Program in Race and Ethnicity, New York, The New School), Bill Kouélany (artist and author, Brazzaville, Congo), Nayansaku Mufwankolo (Delegate of Diversity & Inclusion, HEAD, Geneva), and Dr. Henri-Michel Yéré (historian and poet, University of Basel).

#### Curator

Dr. Céline Eidenbenz, in dialogue with the Advisory Board

#### Assistant Curator

Sarah Mühlebach

#### Mediation

Laura Kingsley

#### Advisory Board

Mandy Abou Shoak, social educator and anti-racism coach, Zürich

Joshua Amissah, photo editor, editor, curator, Berlin and Zürich

Sasha Huber, artist, Helsinki

Laura Kingsley, artist and mediator, Dübendorf

Nayansaku Mufwankolo, Delegate of Diversity & Inclusion, Lecturer for Cultural Studies and Critical Theory, Haute école d'art et de design (HEAD), Genf

#### Media Preview

Friday, 1/9/2023, 11 am

Information and registration: [christina.omlin@ag.ch](mailto:christina.omlin@ag.ch)

#### Vernissage, Exhibition Opening

Saturday, 2/9/2023, 6 pm

Free admission

#### Preview for the Art Association

Saturday, 2/9/2023, 4-5 pm

Exclusive preview for members of the Aargau Art Association

#### Open House

Sunday, 3/9/2023, 10 am - 5 pm

Free admission

#### Finissage, Exhibition Closing

Sunday, 7/1/2024, starting at 2 pm

## Complementary Programme

Anti-Racism Workshop with Mandy Abou Shoak  
Saturday, 23/9/2023, 1-4:30 pm

Performance Reading of *Stranger in the Village* with Brandy Butler  
Thursday, 28/9/2023, 6-8 pm

Open Door – Human Rights Day  
Sunday, 10/12/2023  
Free admission

Presentation of the exhibition publication & round table, “What have we learned/unlearned?”  
Sunday, 7/1/2024, 2-4 pm

Admission to the museum is free on Thursday evenings between 5 pm and 8 pm. This applies to the entire duration of the exhibition *Stranger in the Village* (2/9/2023 – 7/1/2024).

In collaboration with Bühne Aarau, Freier Film Aarau Cinema, and local institutions, such as Integration Aarau, Peter and Paul Parish in Aarau, and the Regional Integration Office Aarau, we are setting up a diverse accompanying programme in the Aargauer Kunsthhaus and elsewhere.

To view the entire programme of related events, visit [aargauerkunsthhaus.ch](http://aargauerkunsthhaus.ch)

## Appreciation

Kanton Aargau, Aargauischer Kunstverein (Sponsorship)

Credit Suisse (Partner Aargauer Kunsthhaus)

With the generous support of: Swisslos Kanton Aargau, Stadt Aarau, Bundesamt für Kultur [Federal Cultural Office], Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft – Fachstelle für Rassismusbekämpfung [Federal Anti-Racism Office], Schweizer Kulturstiftung Pro Helvetia, Ernst Göhner Stiftung, Stiftung für Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte, Stanley Thomas Johnson Stiftung, Paul Schiller Stiftung, Zürich  
Media partner: Aargauer Zeitung

## Opening Hours, Aargauer Kunsthhaus

Tuesdays – Sundays, 10 am - 5 pm  
Thursdays, 10 am - 8 pm  
Closed Mondays

## Opening Hours on Public Holidays

10 am - 5 pm

Boxing Day, 26/12/2023, 10 am - 5 pm  
New Year's Eve, 31/12/2023, 10 am - 5 pm  
New Year's Day, 1/1/2024, 10 am - 5 pm

Christmas Eve, 24/12/2023, closed  
Christmas, 25/12/2023, closed

## Images

On our website [aargauerkunsthaus.ch/media](http://aargauerkunsthaus.ch/media) images are available for download. Please note the image credits.

## Additional information

Dr. Céline Eidenbenz, Curator and Head of Programme

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