

# MICHAEL PIRGELIS KUNSTRAUM DORNBIERN

03 JUL  
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2026

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# Michail Pirgelis: *HYLE*

## Media information overview

Facts and figures      Artist Michail Pirgelis  
Title *HYLE*  
Exhibition dates 3 July–8 November 2026

Press preview Wednesday, 1 July 2026, 10.30 am  
Opening Thursday, 2 July 2026, 7 pm  
Artist talk Friday, 3 July 2026, 2 pm  
Dates for educational activities can be found on page 7

Download press images      → [www.kunstraumdornbirn.at](http://www.kunstraumdornbirn.at)

Teaser      From **3 July to 8 November 2026**, Kunstraum Dornbirn presents *HYLE*, Michail Pirgelis’s first institutional solo exhibition in Austria. Born in Essen in 1976, raised in Greece, and now based in Cologne, Pirgelis has been working for over two decades with materials from decommissioned passenger planes—exterior walls, rows of windows, floor panels—which he strips of their original function by scraping, sanding and fragmenting them to create abstract sculptures. The exhibition title draws on the Aristotelian concept of hyle (ύλη): matter in relation to form, the potential of material to take shape. This identifies the conceptual core of Pirgelis’s practice.

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With *HYLE*, Kunstraum Dornbirn presents the first institutional solo exhibition in Austria by **Michail Pirgelis**. For the historic assembly hall, Pirgelis—born in Essen in 1976, raised in Greece, and now based in Cologne—has developed a large-scale installation. Here, monumental works created between 2012 and 2026 are brought into dialogue with the unique spatial conditions of the venue—an arrangement that can simultaneously be read as a statement regarding the very concept of sculpture. *HYLE* places the question of sculpture's essence at its centre, exploring material, form, and the process of their fusion.

Hyle (ἕλη), the Greek word for matter and raw material, denotes the as yet unformed, shapeless mass. In Aristotle's philosophy, the term reveals its full philosophical depth: hyle is always conceived in relation to morphe (μορφή), shape, form, appearance. Matter and form are mutually dependent; neither exists without the other. It is only within this relationship that hyle becomes the principle of form-taking, the potential awaiting shaping. For Pirgelis, this is not an abstract construct, but a precise description of his own practice and its conceptual core.

For more than twenty years, the artist has been sourcing materials such as rows of windows, outer walls and floor panels from decommissioned passenger planes, which he selects primarily from aircraft graveyards in the Mojave Desert in California and processes them in his Cologne studio. Each work begins with the readymade gesture—an industrially manufactured, authentic part is transferred into an artistic context—yet decisively transcends the gesture during the production process. Through stripping, grinding, polishing and deliberate fragmentation, the material is removed so far from its original function that its legibility as a functional object plays only a marginal role. What emerges is an abstraction that is not constructed, but uncovered.

““My interest lies in materials from aviation, but what really drives me is the search for authentic materials with a distinct history. My aim is not to highlight or expose technical progress. Rather, I am interested in alienating the material from its purpose and pointing towards a different reality.”<sup>1</sup> Michail Pirgelis

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<sup>1</sup> 'Im Gespräch' (In Conversation) in *David Ostrowski Michail Pirgelis. To lose*, exhibition catalogue, Leopold-Hoesch-Museum & Papiermuseum Düren (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2016), p. 130.

This material-based practice carries multi-layered art-historical references: alongside the mechanisms of the readymade, the sculptures reactivate conventions of Minimalism and Post-Minimalism—while simultaneously questioning them. In terms of material and form, they allude to Minimalist sculpture; yet whereas Minimalism aims for control, homogeneity and the erasure of the artist's hand, Pirgelis counters this impulse. Surfaces are deliberately left imperfect; scratches create graphic elements, while residual traces of paint reveal gestural qualities—traces of Abstract Expressionism, which here is not an expression of subjectivity but of use and time. The material stands on the threshold between object and non-object: familiar in its materiality, alien in its meaning, no longer definable in its form.

The titles open up a whole new dimension. *China Girl*, *No Dancing in the Aisles*, *Never Ending Story (I, II and III)*, *Desert Star*, *LOST* or *Motor Guide*—the names of the works draw on pop culture, everyday language, and collective visual memory, sometimes with an ironic undertone. The *Never Ending Story* is fragmented into three parts, and *China Girl*—initially a song made world-famous by David Bowie in 1983—was also the nickname of a Virgin Atlantic Airbus that ended up in an aircraft graveyard. The material and its title intersect without explaining one another: a layer that reveals itself only to those who seek it. The titles don't fix meaning; they hold it in suspense.

The works on display in Dornbirn give visual form to this complexity. A single motif runs through the exhibition: the round, semi-circular, arched form—variations on a cross-section dictated by the aeroplane, which Pirgelis translates into different formal registers. *ECHO* (2022, 308 × 490 × 290 cm) and *UNIVRS* (2012/2018, 305 × 556 × 62 cm) are monumental arches: *ECHO* occupies the space as a three-dimensional volume that defines the interior and exterior; *UNIVRS* extends the form horizontally—an outward gesture of reaching across. *Memory Games* (2017, 414 × 395 × 120 cm) and *LOST* (2022, 338 × 338 × 80 cm) counter this in different ways with the closed nature of the circular form: no opening, no passage—the form turns in on itself. The large-format, horizontally oriented works such as *Desert Star I* and *II* (both 2022) play a complementary role. They counter the circular movement with the tranquillity of panels of the same format—a serial logic that refers to monochrome visual fields.

# Michail Pirgelis: *HYLE*

## Press text

The positioning of the sculptures in the assembly hall allows this complexity to be experienced in space, linking the material history of the works with the industrial history of the building. Both tell a story of use, wear and tear, and transformation. Yet hyle means more than just raw material; it also signifies potential, the state of the as-yet-undecided. Pirgelis's sculptures never fully forsake this state: they are formed but not finished; legible but indefinable. *HYLE*, the exhibition title, is therefore not a retrospective on the source material, but a description of a state that extends to the viewer's act of reception: the work remains in motion as long as it is being viewed.



Michail Pirgelis: *Memory Games* (2017), installation view *ANTI*, Athens Biennale, Athens, 2018, © Michail Pirgelis, courtesy of the artist/Sprüth Magers.

# Michail Pirgelis

## Biography

**Michail Pirgelis** was born in Essen in 1976, grew up in Greece, and now lives and works in Cologne. His works have been shown in numerous solo exhibitions, including at Kunstraum Munich (2026); Fuhrwerkswaage, Cologne, and Odyssey, Cologne (both 2022); Braunsfelder, Cologne (2019, with Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt); Leopold-Hoesch-Museum, Düren (2016, with David Ostrowski); Autocenter Berlin (2015); and Artothek, Cologne (2011). Selected group exhibitions include Haus N, Athens and Cloud Seven, Brussels (both 2026); Wilhelm Hallen, Berlin (2022); byvier, Cologne (2021); Ludwig Forum, Aachen, and Gewölbe, Cologne (both 2020); DuMont Kunsthalle, Cologne, Kunsthalle Nürnberg, Haus N, Athens, and Riot, Ghent (all 2019); Sculpture in the City, London (2018–19), Athens Biennale; Kunstverein Reutlingen, and Marta Herford (all 2018); Rubell Family Collection, Miami (2015); Istanbul Modern (2014); Bundeskunsthalle Bonn (2013); Museum Morsbroich, Leverkusen (2012); Thessaloniki Biennale (2011); Kunstmuseum Bonn (2010); and Stadtmuseum Düsseldorf (2005). Among the awards and scholarships he has received are the Berlin Scholarship from the Academy of Arts, Berlin (2013), the Audi Art Award for “New Positions” at Art Cologne (2010), the Adolf Loos Prize from the van den Valentyn Foundation, Cologne (as its first ever recipient, 2008) and the Villa Romana Prize, Florence (2007).

# Michail Pirgelis: *HYLE*

## Dates and Education

### **Artist Talk**

3 July 2026, 2 pm

### Artist Talk

Join us for a conversation between Michail Pirgelis and Kunstraum director Thomas Häusle. We look forward to fascinating insights into the artistic practice and the exhibition.

### **After-Work-Tour**

30 July and  
24 Sept 2026

### After-Work-Tour

Thursdays, 6 pm

These engaging guided tours of the exhibition offer an insight into the artist's work and the exhibition.

### **Educational resources**

Kunstraum Kompass

### Kunstraum Kompass

The art educator Christa Bohle has developed the popular Kunstraum Kompass for the exhibition. The leaflet features creative activities designed to encourage kids to engage with the exhibition in their own individual and enjoyable way through painting, searching, puzzle-solving, and their imaginations. Kunstraum Kompass will be available free of charge in the hall shortly after the exhibition opens, along with borrowable pencils.

### **PH Vorarlberg**

6 October 2026,  
3-4:30 pm

### Guided Tour for Teachers | Pädagogische Hochschule Vorarlberg

In these tours, interested teachers will gain an insight into the work of the Kunstverein, focusing on its concept, programme and educational outreach. A second focus of the tours is the respective exhibition. Using the exhibited works of the individual artists, we will discuss different approaches to the medium and how these can be used in educational settings. You can find more information here: [www.kunstraumdornbirn.at](http://www.kunstraumdornbirn.at)

### **Reiseziel Museum**

5 July and 2 August 2026

### Reiseziel Museum | Destination Museum

Families can once again look forward to a fantastic summer of museums with the "Reiseziel Museum" initiative! On Sundays 5 July and 2 August 2026, young and old alike can set off on a journey. Participating museums in Vorarlberg, Liechtenstein and the canton of St. Gallen will open their doors and bring the museums to life with entertaining family programmes. Here at Kunstraum Dornbirn, art educator Christa Bohle has a marvellous programme in store for visitors of all ages.

You can find more information here: [www.reiseziel-museum.com](http://www.reiseziel-museum.com)

# Michail Pirgelis: *HYLE*

## Dates and Education

**Children's Summer**  
20 – 24 July and  
27 – 31 July 2026

Children's Summer in the Stadtgarten—a two-week programme of fun and games at the Stadtgarten in Dornbirn

inatura, the Vorarlberg Institute of Architecture, and Kunstraum Dornbirn are once again joining forces to invite you to one of Dornbirn's most beautiful venues. Children between seven and eleven can spend two weeks with us, from Monday to Friday, as budding young researchers, artists and architects.

You can find more information here: [www.kunstraumdornbirn.at](http://www.kunstraumdornbirn.at)

Christa Bohle leading workshops with children, Kunstraum Dornbirn 2022, photos by Darko Todorovic



### About us

Kunstraum Dornbirn was founded in 1987 as a non-profit association with the aim of presenting and fostering contemporary art. Since 2003, it has been holding exhibitions in the historic assembly hall of the former Rüscherwerke machine factory in Dornbirn's Stadtgarten, which offers ideal conditions for displaying large-scale installations. The quality of the architecture in its original, raw state offers an excellent setting for current trends in international art. Three exhibitions a year showcase both established, internationally renowned artists and emerging voices.

The exhibition history of Kunstraum Dornbirn has been shaped by artists such as Karla Black and Anna Hulačová (both 2025), Toni Schmale (2024), Chiharu Shiota and Judith Fegerl (both 2023), Monika Sosnowska and Robert Kuśmirowski (both 2022), Tony Oursler and Peter Sandbichler (both 2021), Atelier Van Lieshout and Claudia Comte (both 2020), Bernd Oppl (2019), Thomas Feuerstein (2018), Hans Op de Beek (2017), Nathalie Djurberg & Hans Berg (2016), Berline de Bruyckere (2015), Not Vital and Tue Greenford (both 2012), Jan Kopp (2010), and Mark Dion and Roman Signer (both 2008).

### Site and infrastructure

Vorarlberg lies in the four-country region around Lake Constance, enjoying easy access to and lively exchange between Austria, Germany, Switzerland and Liechtenstein. The region is not only scenically attractive for tourism; another significant added value is the dense and high-quality cultural activity of a wide variety of institutions in both the performing and visual arts. Kunstraum Dornbirn's present building, the large brick assembly hall, was built in 1893 on the Rüscherwerke site. Following an international landscape planning competition in 1999/2000, the grounds were redesigned as the "Stadtgarten" or City Garden. Key buildings of the Rüscherwerke, such as the assembly hall, were preserved to create an urban leisure and cultural venue. Measuring 30 meters in length and 14 meters in width, the former assembly hall has a total area of 440 square meters and offers an ideal venue for exhibiting large-scale installations.

Subsidy provider Stadt Dornbirn | Land Vorarlberg | Republik Österreich

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