

ADDIS CONTEMPORARY II, 6 YEARS ON  
14 April - 7 May, 2021



circle art gallery



Kirubel Abebe, Stranded I, 2020, Acrylic on Canvas, 100 x 90 cm

Kirubel Abebe  
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Several of Ethiopia's early-modern and/or modern artists, coming out of a centuries-old tradition of painting sacred religious figures on the manuscripts and walls of churches, went to Europe to study art under the patronage of Emperor Menelik II (1889 – 1913).

The diasporic movement and imperial patronage became the reasons for the emergence of what is usually known as 'Ethiopian Traditional Art'. This state-sponsored scholarship programme, sending students to study art in many parts of the world, was also continued by Haileselassie II (1930-1974). Together with the Emperor, Alle Felegeselam Hiruy (1923-2016) who studied at the Chicago Institute of Art, took the initiative to establish the Addis Abeba Fine Art School in 1957.

The school, initially dominated by foreign professors, was able to employ its first graduates who came back from their studies in Poland and Russia. Among these artists, Tadesse Belayneh, Worku Goshu and Tadesse Gizaw revolutionized the school by introducing more proficient academic skills in drawing, painting and sculpting.

This was not only a turning point in the progression of the school, it also laid the groundwork for continued scholarship opportunities for Ethiopian students in the Eastern-bloc strengthened by the Socialist Military Junta, Dergue that ruled the country from 1974-1991. The return of Ethiopian Diaspora artists in the 1960s who were educated abroad, is a pivotal moment in Ethiopia's modern and contemporary art history. H.E. World Laureate Maitre Artist, Afework Tekle, Eskundur Boghossian and Gebre Kiristos Desta are important artists to mention.

The 1990s was a decade where groups of artists came together with diverse outlooks. 'The Dimension Group' and 'The Point Group' were among the pioneers. This trend was continued by the younger artists, forming collectives like: 'NAS/New Art Space', 'Habesha Studio', 'Nubia Visual Art Studio', 'Netsa Art Village', 'Kirar Studio' and 'Kitab Studio'. These are some of the major ones that have really played an important role in creating a critical mass of artists. Entoto TVET Fine Art College that opened in 2009 has also become a contributor to the thriving, exciting contemporary art scene of Ethiopia.

These historical circumstances are some of the reasons for the advancement and individuality of contemporary art in Ethiopia. This second version of 'Addis Contemporary II, 6 years on' can be regarded as a snapshot of how the Addis art scene has flourished from the fertile bed rock of the modernist period. The participating artists are a cross section, representing the determined growth of the city's art scene. We can see a thematic and stylistic range; from the modernist painter Tibebe Terffa's sustained practice of aesthetics to the established and emerging artists who bring vigorous academic skills; research and contemporary approaches to making art. This show, six years after the first edition, displays the depth and breadth of Ethiopia's contemporary art, which for so long has stood alienated from the East African art scene but is now becoming increasingly interconnected to the artscape of the South.

This exhibition could instigate further scholarly and independent investigation into Ethiopia's art scene, as well as a chance to access and collect contemporary art from Addis.

**Mifta Zeleke**, Curator, April 2021

# Kirubel Abebe



Kirubel Abebe, *Stranded II*, 2020, Acrylic on canvas, 80.5 x 80.5 cm

Kirubel Abebe, born in 1992, is a futuristic artist whose works explore the wide range of human temperaments, characteristics, and behaviors. A variety of his works are figurative paintings inspired by his daily analysis and interactions with people's often fluctuating emotions: ego, pride, fear, taboos, belief and traditions. He was born and raised in Addis Ababa where his interest in art emerged from a true desperation of visualizing and projecting life. He studied at the Alle School of Fine Art and Design (2010-2013) where his interest strengthened and was transformed to passion.

Kirubel has showcased his works on both local and international platforms. He's currently working as a full-time studio artist. He says that being an artist is like being on life support, the thought of existing without creating becomes a forbidden fruit, something that should never be experienced or touched.

# Surafel Amare



Surafel Amare, *Presence I*, 2021, Mixed media on canvas, 60 x 50 cm

Surafel Amare was born in 1987 in Gondar, Ethiopia. He graduated in Bachelor of Fine Arts, 2010 from Alle School of Fine Arts and Design, Addis Ababa University. Surafel is a studio artist, graphic designer, and illustrator whose media include painting, graphic art, video, mixed media and digital art. Surafel's works are a means to investigate the underlying desire in everything he does. Surafel's work aims to breathe life into the growing alienation of the world due to increased mediation by and reliance on the mechanical and the electronic. His ambition is to reveal the hidden in the obvious through astute observation of daily life and shift perceptions of reality. Temporality, the invisible layers of redundancy and rhythm are some of the consequent subjects that he tries to address in his work.

He was the second runner up in the 2019 edition of the Emerging Painting Invitational Prize. Surafel has participated in various group exhibitions in Ethiopia, Kenya and Zimbabwe and had two solo shows in Ethiopia.

# Engidaget Legesse Amede



Engidaget Legesse Amede, *Empty Room (05)*, 2011, Acrylic on canvas, 200 x 165 cm

Engidaget Legesse Amede was born in 1971 in Addis Ababa, in the district of Zebgna Sefer, known as the Village of the Guardians. He studied at the Alle School of Fine Art and Design, specializing in ‘monumental painting’ until he graduated with a distinction in 1993. The conclusion of his studies coincided with a time of serious social upheaval. He collaborated with St. George Gallery and Goethe Institute in Addis Ababa until he traveled to Berlin to showcase his works – spiritual painting from Ethiopia. He followed this exhibition with several others in France, Italy, Great Britain, and USA.

One of his most prominent bodies of works is a series called, Empty Rooms. These paintings seek emptiness in contrast to the overstimulation and abundance of modern, omnipresent art in museums. Empty spaces are empty, hollow bodies; a room or a hall that you can enter. Alternatively, there is the sense of “spaces” as open areas, white spots or places onto which something can be projected.

# Kidus Bezzawok



**Kidus Bezzawok**, *Melting Time #2*, 2020, Acrylic on canvas,  
99.5 x 80 cm

Born in 1989, Kidus Bezzawok graduated from Entoto poly-technique college of fine arts. Since early on in his artistic career, he gravitates towards abstract art. In his works, he explores the diverse characteristics of the individual spaces we occupy in shared settings. He plays freely with the borders of a canvas fighting against limitations or boxes that he believes restrict knowledge of each other.

# Dereje Demissie



Dereje Demissie, *Untitled II*, 2016, Acrylic on canvas, 109 × 120 cm

Dereje Demissie was born in 1978 and is a graduate of the Alle School of Fine Arts and Design, Addis Ababa University. He has exhibited widely in leading galleries in Ethiopia, Sudan, Germany and Uganda. Dereje is a founder and member of the Nubia Art Studio.

Dereje's work examines the relationship between the human psyche and its surrounding environment. In his picture planes, he depicts imaginary landscapes, using a combination of brilliant colors, multiple under-paint textures and a combination of spontaneously applied brush strokes. He works predominantly with acrylic paint, which gives him flexibility to connect with his thoughts easily.

# Henok Getachew



Henok Getachew, *Earth Hour*, 2020, Mixed media on canvas, 180 x 140 cm

Henok Getachew, born in 1984, began his artistic practice at a very young age, creating miniature tools out of found materials and drawings. Later he joined Addis Ababa University's Ale School of Fine Arts and Design where he graduated with a B.A in Arts Education in 2008. In 2009, Henok co-founded an artist's collective named Netsa Art Village with ten other Ethiopian Artists. Henok generates work through experimentation with concepts and techniques ranging from performances, painting and mixed media. His artwork is created intuitively and aimed to raise critical discussions toward life existence, consumerism, climate change, the relationship of technology and society. Through his artistic practice Henok continuously searches for connections and meanings among his existence, his surrounding environment and other living beings.

# Girmachew Getnet



Girmachew Getnet, *Untitled (Triptych B)*, 2021, Mixed media on cardboard, 105 x 108 cm

Girmachew Getnet was born in Addis Ababa in 1980. He graduated from Alle School of fine arts and design in 2001. Getnet works in a distinct style that combines drawing and painting. His love for these two medias creates a dynamic dialogue in his works. Getnet has expanded his artistic range to include experimental film to accompany his more traditional media. Getnet has participated in group and individual exhibitions at the Alliance Ethio-Francaise, Goethe Institut Addis Ababa, the Gebre Kristos Desta Center and the International Community School. Internationally, he has exhibited in Germany, Sweden, and the Czech Republic. He currently lives and works in Frankfurt, Germany.

In this triptych, Getnet references the ancient history of the Ethiopian King Agapo/ Agabos and the giant snake Wainimba. Thousands of years ago, there lived a giant snake named “Wainimba” who fed on the people of the village and their animals eventually leaving them hungry and poor for four hundred years. It wasn’t until Agapo (Father of the great Queen Sheba/ Makeda), who was just a traveler by then, received a message from God on how to kill this giant snake and save the people from all the misery it brought on them. Upon his victory, the villagers made Agapo their king. “I think of the system we are governed by now as the giant snake, getting bigger and bigger each time it feeds on our peace, unity, love, wisdom, and fears. The entire system around our world is against the human circle, the human community. Humans were created to live freely, but with moral freedom. And I say, just like Agapo used his message to kill Wainimba, I believe I can also battle this system dividing and wearying us through my art.

# Tamrat Gezahagne



Tamrat Gezahegne was born in 1977 in Addis Ababa. He graduated from the Alle School of Fine Arts and Design, Addis Ababa University, in 2000 with a Diploma in Painting. He is a founding member of Netsa Art Village. Tamrat's work as an artist ranges from being a landscape and portrait painting to a studio practice marked by relentless experimentation, extending to installations and performances. In addition to the numerous group and solo shows in Ethiopia, Tamrat has shown his works in Kenya, Egypt, Germany, Spain, Norway, France, the Netherlands, Pakistan, USA, UAE and Sweden.

Tamrat Gezahagn, *Adorne Body*, 2021, Acrylic & paper mache on wood, Smallest: 20 x 20 cm, Largest: 29 x 24 cm, Depth 5cm

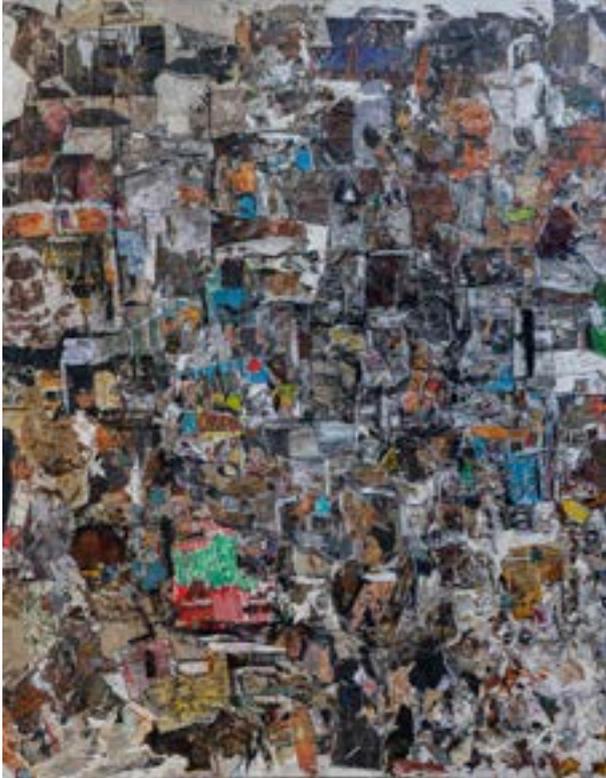
# Merlon Hailu



Merlon Hailu, *Landscape II*, 2020,  
Fabric on canvas, 40 x 60 cm

Merlon Hailu, born in 1987, is an artist employing the unique technique of making artworks with textile materials and fibers. She is a lecturer at the Alle School of Fine Arts and Design and is among a few Ethiopian artists that have mastered textile art. Merlon has experimented with yarn and employed various techniques in her artistic practice. Readymade crochet pieces, layers of thread, tightly rolled coils of yarn, cut-up wads of thread all add texture and complexity to her work. She has carefully contoured the landscape of her imagination, offering views into the microscopic inner workings of anatomy and hints at a more tender world.

# Engidaye Lemma



Engidaye Lemma, *Untitled I*, 2020, Mixed media on canvas,  
150.5 × 120.5 cm

Engidaye Lemma was born in 1988 in Dessie, Ethiopia. He graduated from the Addis Ababa University, Alle School of Fine Arts and Design in 2015 with BFA in Graphic Art and went on to teach at the same school. He has exhibited his works in numerous group shows in Ethiopia.

Engidaye's interest lies in the beauty and enigma of old houses, as remnants of a city's history. These houses, as one of the main vestiges of the past, embody the social interactions that persisted for a long while. They are among the most neglected aspects of the city, shadowed by the frantic turmoil of modernization under the guise of "new" and "developed" structures. Engidaye brings these ruins to the forefront and studies their essence, to trace the origins of our impulses today.

# Ashenafi Mestika



Ashenafi Mestika, *Untitled II*, 2020, Acrylic on canvas, 120 x 120 cm

Ashenafi Mestika was born in 1987 in Addis Ababa, and received a Diploma in Fine Art from Entoto Technical and Vocational Education Training College. In 2020 he graduated from Alle School of Fine Art & Design with a specialization in painting. For the past decade, Ashenafi has participated in different group exhibitions in Addis Ababa.

Ashenafi enjoys the interpretation of socio-political happenstance into visual form. He uses sketches as a starting point for his creative process. He then reforms, deforms, magnifies, crops, overlaps these sketches, replacing visual elements to translate and adapt the information he perceives from his surroundings through his different senses. His practice spans various media including drawing, painting, photography and video art.

# Selome Muleta



Selome Muleta, *In Pattern I*, 2020, Acrylic on canvas, 89.5 × 100 cm

Selome Muleta (b. 1992) is one of the most exciting young female artists to emerge from the Ethiopian visual arts scene in recent years. Her latest body of work explores womanhood, both as an idea and as a lived experience. She's graduated from Abyssinia Fine Art School and Entoto Polytechnic college but primarily identifies as a self-taught artist. She began her practice exploring cartography, painting maps in different figures and forms.

Selome's work consists primarily of portraits, as she depicts female subjects in different contexts and as various imagined characters. She aims to depict women in states of inner reflection, her paintings encapsulating private moments and experiences across a spectrum of emotions, symptomatic of both a natural and performative femininity.

Selome has exhibited her works in solo shows at the Guramayne Art center, Addis Fine Art, Fendika Art Gallery, and Alliance Ethio-Française.

# Amare Selfu



Amare Selfu, *Untitled I*, 2019, Acrylic on canvas, 263 x 137 cm

Amare Seifu's abstract work addresses various social issues. Born in 1979, he graduated from Alle School of Fine Arts and Design with the highest honor, and began teaching at the art school as a lecturer in drawing and painting. In 2010, Amare was appointed chair of the Painting Department and Curator of Alle School of Fine Arts' Art Gallery. He also co-founded Point Fine Arts and Design Studio. He oversaw and worked on several high-profile design and fine art projects, including a large-scale mosaic work located at the main building entrance of the National Museum of Ethiopia.

In 2012, he moved to Maryland to pursue an MFA in Studio Art at Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) and graduated in August 2015. He currently teaches an undergraduate course at MICA and Montgomery College. He has exhibited in Ethiopia, USA, UK, and France.

# Alexander Tadesse



Alexander Tadesse, *Self Mirroring*, Oil on canvas, 2020, 100 x 100 cm

Alexander Tadesse was born in 1983, and grew up in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. His passion for art led him to join the Addis Ababa University Alle school of fine arts and design after completing his high school education. He specialized in painting during his studies at Entoto polytechnic college of fine arts. His formal training contributed to the development of his techniques and academic skills to showcase his perspective as an artist. He experiments with different art forms such as painting, graphic design and cartoon animation.

# Tiemar Tegene



Tiemar Tegene, *Mask Off*, 2021, Print on paper, 50 x 70 cm

Tiemar Tegene, born in 1993 in Addis Ababa Ethiopia, received a BFA in printmaking at Alle school of fine Art and Design, Addis Ababa in 2018 E.C. She is a full-time studio artist and uses different print techniques with a heavy focus on etching and print-making techniques

Tiemar is interested in the boundaries that exist among human beings: those that materialize naturally and others that are constructed. She explores the use of these boundaries as a tool for power and control. The people who appear in her works are nameless; they are tributes to the “disappeared”, the “rejected”, those who are considered “collateral damage”, the “disenfranchised”; they are “figures”, “victims”, and “statistics”. Tiemar believes that denying the occurrence of human tragedies across the world does not make them disappear. On the contrary, atrocities such as torture, poverty, injustice cast shadows on our fragile comfort zones.

# Tibebe Terffa



Tibebe Terffa, *Untitled II*, 2016, Acrylic on canvas, 75 × 90 cm

Tibebe Terffa was born in Harar, Ethiopia, in 1948 and is one of the foremost modernist painters in Ethiopia. He's a prolific and versatile artist, with a range of styles that form the undercurrents of contemporary visual art in Addis Ababa. He studied at the Addis Ababa School of Fine Art (present day Alle School of Fine Arts and Design of Addis Ababa University) from where he graduated in painting in 1973. During his school years (1970-1973), Tibebe and his friends formed the Sixteen Young Artists Association to stage exhibitions around the country. He worked as an art instructor at the Medhane Alem Comprehensive High School in Harar from 1973 to 1980. In 1981, he moved to Addis Ababa, and worked as an illustrator for Kuraz Publishing House until 1983. Since 1984, he has maintained a studio practice from his residence in Addis Ababa. He has exhibited in numerous solo exhibitions in Ethiopia, Kenya, Germany, Canada, USA, and Spain.

# Eyasu Teylانه



Eyasu Teylانه, *Private Reputation of Colours I*, 2021,  
Acrylic on Canvas, 100 x 78 cm

Eyasu Tilayeneh was born in Bahir Dar, Ethiopia in 1993. He's graduated from the Alle School of Fine Arts and Design 2017. In 2020 he received the first prize in the Emerging Painting Invitational.

Eyasu' work begins from the external world. In every situation, he says, his eyes and mind never stop taking in visual images. He refers to his mind's ability to find pattern and meaning in this chaos as 'thin-slicing'. Eyasu's practice reflects his interest in mathematics and physics, with strong emphasis on geometry. He synthesizes form and color as a way of building up a picture plane and making sense of a reality which is often at odds with perfection.

# Leayne Tilahun



Leayne Tilahun, *Reminiscence I*, 2019, Acrylic on canvas, 249 × 140 cm

Leayne Tilahun was born in 1988 in Dessie, Ethiopia. He graduated from the Alle School of Fine Arts and Design in Painting, Addis Ababa University, in 2012. Through the years, Leayne's paintings have acted as a screen that reflects the human psyche. His recent works are characterized by anatomical contortions representing the fluid, foggy, dreamlike, sometimes agonized state of mind of the contemporary human. Leayne is inspired by his dreams. He engages with dreams as a way to resolve the mysteries of life, and regards them as a manifestation of the life that humans are meant to live in. In his art practice, he uses ambiguity of form to recreate and connect his works to the myth and aesthetics of dreams.

He has participated in various group exhibitions, workshops and has had a solo exhibition in Ethiopia. He received the First Solo Residency prize in the 2019 Emerging Painting Invitational prize.

Circle was founded in 2012 and opened our permanent gallery space in Nairobi, aiming to be the foremost exhibition space in East Africa. Our intention is to create a strong and sustainable art market for East African artists by supporting and promoting the most innovative and exciting artists currently practicing in the region. We exhibit carefully curated, challenging and thought-provoking contemporary art and invite guest curators to work with us.

Circle collaborates with a diverse group of contemporary artists across East Africa as well as representing a small group exclusively. We participate in international art fairs and engage with the art community by providing a venue for presentations from local and international artists, curators, art critics, collectors and academics.

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Front Cover: Dereje Demisse, *Untitled I*, 2016, Acrylic on canvas, 109 x 109 cm  
Back Cover: Girmachew Getnet, *Untitled (Triptych A,B,C)*, 2021, Mixed media on cardboard, 105 x 108 cm

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Catalogue designed by Daudi Kaggwa

