

## TARIKU SHIFERAW

Also Known as Africa 2018 | Booth C16

Carreau du temple, Paris, France

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Tariku Shiferaw, I'd Free All My Sons (Nas), 2016, 168 x 137 cm

Addis Fine Art is pleased to present a solo exhibition by Tariku Shiferaw featuring works from his "One of These Black Boys" series for the 2018 edition of AKAAs, Also Known As African art and design fair, Paris.

Tariku Shiferaw was born in 1983 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. When he was eleven he moved with his family to California. Growing up, his earliest influence was his older brother who was a gifted draughtsman and illustrator, but who chose to pursue a career in business instead of the arts. Encouraged by his high school art teacher, Tariku found his passion for drawing. After taking part in the prestigious CSSSA summer program at the California Institute of the Arts he knew he wanted to become an artist, and in 2003 he enrolled in art school. Practising his skill in drawing and painting and looking at contemporary artists like Lucien Freud and Jennie Saville his focus in the early years was on painting landscapes and figure abstraction, distorting reality as a way to escape reality.

Encountering the work of Ethiopian American artist Julie Meheretu was a light bulb moment for Tariku. To encounter an artist that he could identify with, gave him the impetus to further his explorations with abstraction and mark-making. From 2014, inspired by the painterly gestures of Jackson Pollock and American Abstract Expressionism, he started studying the art by the Australian aboriginals and their use of patterns as a form of language and expression. His *"Mark Making"* Series were Tariku's first steps into abstraction. He was working with patterns but not just for the sake of patterns. Exploring the meanings of patterns and symbols used in everyday life. The study of geometric forms led him eventually to the layered meanings of the symbol "X". The use and interpretation of this symbol in different cultures over the centuries have been countless. His current series *"One of These Black Boys"* evolved out of his explorations into the deconstruction of the symbol "X".

In his series, *"One of These Black Boys"*, Tariku explores painting and societal structures through mark-making. Mark making in his words, *"is following in the traditional conversation of painting and making marks and gestures that interrogate the space. A mark, like in the caveman days, says 'I am here' or 'I was here.' It reveals the thinker behind the gesture. It's some sort of evidence that someone was there prior to the marks to affect the space. I believe the identity of the mark-maker is as equally important as the mark itself. Or else, the context can be blurred and forgotten behind the physical aesthetics."*

Taking the names of songs from Hip-Hop, R&B, Jazz, Blues, and Reggae music, Shiferaw makes paintings that embody the experiences and struggles expressed through music by Black artists and composers. Shiferaw often explores a spectrum of topics ranging from the notion of black bodies in a white social construct to the popular idioms of romance, sex and daily life. Appropriating song titles as points of reference for his paintings, the works automatically inherit musical references, identities and histories. Every song used to title his paintings relays a story that refers to a specific reality; Tariku explains *"So, a piece could be titled 'If I Rule The World (Nas),' which references the 1996 song by Nas featuring Ms. Lauren Hill and what the song accomplished in society at that time. It was very poetic, deep, and spoke to the current circumstance of the everyday life for the Black body. It was a song that helped imagine an alternative reality, similar to what Afrofuturism does in the visual arts world."* It is important to understand that the works are not a visual representation of these songs. The titles are, in their own way, an addition to the physical mark-making, one of the many layers the paintings are composed of. Thus, Shiferaw utilises repetitive patterns both aesthetically and conceptually. Subtle, yet intricate, the works inhabit a distinct space and powerful authority, acting as placeholders for Black bodies; they establish, quite literally, a way of being "seen" in a society that often prefers overlooking the Other.

Using a variety of materials like, tape, plastic and wooden pallets his works are formal, minimal, inherently abstract. Initially, the geometric horizontal and vertical bands were inspired by the forms of stacked shipping pallets he encountered on the streets in New York City. Then he began to think about music structures as well as censorship, which later translated to the censorship of Black

existence. According to Adrienne Edwards, Curator at the Walker Art Centre in Minneapolis, abstraction traditionally wasn't perceived as an option for artists interested in 'blackness'. But Tariku is part of a growing group of black artists using abstraction as a way to engage questions of equity, justice and race related questions but also to embed them in an art historical framework that was previously inaccessible. With his paintings of black bars rendered as elements within a cultural score Shiferaw asserts he does indeed belong here, in this tradition.

*"One of These Black Boys" in Tariku's words "interrogates the act of mark-making and the identity and role of the author of these marks. I use geometric forms because of their ambiguous nature. Placing these forms against the atavistic painterly gestures of art history's abstract movements results in marking oneself into a history that has largely been dominated by the white male. These marks act as redactions that refute that exclusionary discourse in the art world."*

Shiferaw was raised in Los Angeles, where he earned his BFA from the University of Southern California in 2007. In 2015, he received his MFA from Parsons School of Design. Solo exhibitions include, *"This Ain't Safe"*, Cathouse Proper, New York (2018); *"Only God Can Judge Me"*, Vault Gallery, Montpelier; *"Erase Me"*, at Addis Fine Art, London (2017); *"One Of These Black Boys"*, Anthony Philip Fine Art, New York (2017). Selected group exhibitions include *"Men of Change"*, California African American Museum (upcoming 2019), *"To Dream Avant-Garde"*, Hammond Harkins Galleries, Ohio (2018), *"If I go there, I won't stay there"*; Ltd Los Angeles, Los Angeles (2018); *Without Qualities*, Addis Fine Art at Private View, New York (2018); the 2017 Whitney Biennial as part of Occupy Museum's Debt fair; a group exhibition titled *"A Poet\*hical Wager"* at the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland (2017).

Tariku is currently participating in the Independent Study Program at the Whitney Museum of American Art. His work has been featured in Hyperallergic, the Washington Post, and Art In America, among a variety of other publications. Shiferaw currently lives and works in New York.

### **Addis Fine Art**

Founded by Rakeb Sile and Mesai Haileleul, Addis Fine Art is the very first local space and international platform based in Ethiopia. The gallery focuses on highlighting fine art from the Horn of Africa region and its diaspora. In January 2016, Addis Fine Art opened its main gallery space in the heart of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia launching an innovative programme of exhibitions, talks and events, showing a diverse set of modern and contemporary artists from Ethiopia and the diaspora. In October 2016, the AFA Project Space was opened in London, to provide an additional international platform to the gallery's programme. Addis Fine Art is quickly becoming the leading gallery in the region, and continues to strengthen its cross-continental presence at prominent art-fairs, supporting its artists in exhibitions around the globe.

For more press information contact Raku Sile/Judith van Helden on [hello@addisfineart](mailto:hello@addisfineart).

IMAGE DOWNLOAD LINK: <https://we.tl/t-kyJpmGPprc>



Tariku Shiferaw  
I'd free all my sons (Nas), 2016  
Acrylic on plastic  
168 x 137 cm  
Courtesy of the artist & Addis Fine Art



Tariku Shiferaw  
Duck Seazon Wu-Tang), 2017  
Acrylic on plastic  
122 x 91,5 cm  
Courtesy of the artist & Addis Fine Art



Tariku Shiferaw  
Erase Me (Kid Cudi), 2017  
Acrylic on plastic and fabric  
56 x 46 cm  
Courtesy of the artist & Addis Fine Art