

Girma Berta authentically captures the people of Addis Ababa with an iPhone

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Girma Berta: Moving Shadows II, X, 2017

Courtesy of Girma Berta and Addis Fine Art.

Girma Berta is a self-taught photographer who shoots his images on an iPhone. His vibrant, painterly work documents his hometown, Ethiopian

capital Addis Ababa. The artist has been working as a graphic designer for some time while painting on the side, and both those mediums have seeped into his photographic work. In his project *Moving Shadows I + II*, we see masterful, cut-out individuals isolated stylishly on a bold and colourful background.

Girma claims to capture “the beautiful, the ugly and all that is in between”. He refuses to romanticise his subjects, simply documenting them as they are, in a moment of transit. “By isolating my figures”, the photographer explains, “it becomes just about them without any distraction”. The bright tones behind the subjects accentuate them; the yellows, blues and greens pop, drawing our gaze.

These warm colours reflect his city, the fashion, the culture, the feel. “I love contrasting colours”, he explains. “It expresses the contrasting life I see throughout my photography”. Although Girma’s images regularly show figures at work, carrying baskets and pushing carts, they are never portrayed as victims. If poverty is depicted, it is not made emotional, but rather a fact of life, alongside the children who run and play. His work is authentic, showcasing life as it is.

The world he documents is one of the passersby rushing about their business. “When I take the photo it’s like I am not there”, Girma tells us. “I don’t believe humans notice things out of the ordinary while they are in transit; hence a photographer using his phone won’t be noticed”.

The subject matter he examines is thus an isolating one, capturing a planet where everyone is alone. Interested in “compositional harmonies that are brought about by the skewed placement of figures”, Girma’s metaphysical statement is made more intense by his use of space, dropping his figures in the corners of the background.

The images are modern and minimalistic. The photographer’s use of a phone to create his artworks is symbolic of the current digital revolution underway across Africa. He is representative of a younger generation now stepping into a digital art world.



Girma Berta: Moving Shadows II, IV, 2017
Courtesy of Girma Berta and Addis Fine Art.



Girma Berta: Moving Shadows II, VI, 2017
Courtesy of Girma Berta and Addis Fine Art.



Girma Berta: Moving Shadows II, V, 2017

Courtesy of Girma Berta and Addis Fine Art.



Girma Berta: Moving Shadows II, VIII, 2017
Courtesy of Girma Berta and Addis Fine Art.



Girma Berta: Moving Shadows II, XII, 2017
Courtesy of Girma Berta and Addis Fine Art.



Girma Berta: Moving Shadows II, III, 2016
Courtesy of Girma Berta and Addis Fine Art.



Girma Berta: Moving Shadows XVI, 2016
Courtesy of Girma Berta and Addis Fine Art.