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# How Eyerusalem Adugna Jirenga is Changing the Narrative

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a time

By Eliza Jordan

Eyerusalem Adugna Jirenga lives and works in Ethiopia as a photographer. For several years, her eyes have been focused on architecture, fashion, and history, and now she's ready to start her own fashion label. As one of few female photographers in Ethiopia, Jirenga aims to change the narrative of her country through images and self-expression, revealing the dynamic cultural landscape of her country.

Whitewall spoke with Jirenga about the beginnings of her creative interests, her upcoming fashion line, and her hopes of inspiring the next generation of women to dream.



Courtesy of Eyerusalem Jirenga.

**WHITEWALL:** Can you tell us a bit about your beginnings in design, and how that led to your pursuit of photography and fashion?

**EYERUSALEM ADUGNA JIRENGA:** I grew up interested in sketching and other art forms, but in college in the U.S. I took a class for analog photography, which was the first time I was introduced to photography. After coming back to Ethiopia, I spent some time figuring out what I wanted to do. I realized I wanted to design fashion without any pressure. I enrolled into a fashion design course. My eyes were opened to a whole other world of colors and structure. I graduated as the second-best designer of the class. During this time, I was hired to be a photojournalist with a local newspaper and started my own business as a freelance photographer.

**WW:** How does designing fashion fit into your practice? Where does your process begin?

**EAJ:** When I am out photographing my stories, my main focus is on architecture, fashion, culture, and history. At the same time, I am also collecting ideas for my designs. It's been about four years since I have been collecting inspirations for my designs from all over Ethiopia, and now I am in the process of creating a fashion line.

Eyerusalem Jirenga  
City of Saints I  
2017

Courtesy of the artist and Addis Fine Art.

**WW:** Tell us a bit about mixing your love of culture and design in front of and behind the lens.

**EAJ:** Culture is very important for me in understanding my past and the continuation of traditions that was passed down to us. I believe this is important for future generations. It's a great pleasure for me to document the process of these traditions transforming throughout time.

**WW:** You photographed many strong women in your 2017 series "The City of Saints VII." Does it feel empowering to be a woman and photograph other women?

**EAJ:** It is very empowering, because I'm one of few female photographers in Ethiopia. For other women and girls to see me succeeding is an eye-opener, to realize that pursuing their dreams is a possibility. Also, sharing the stories of women and their significant part in society is rewarding.

Eyerusalem Jirenga  
The City of Saints II  
2017

Courtesy of the artist and Addis Fine Art.

**WW:** What do you hope the viewer takes away from your work?

**EAJ:** I'd like the viewer to understand and learn from other beautiful cultures and for people to be aware of what Ethiopia looks like. Ethiopia has been misrepresented through media for decades, and my work is to change the narrative of my country.

**WW:** Is there a particular place you like to see art in Ethiopia? Do you wish there were more art or art establishments present?

**EAJ:** I would like to see more galleries in Ethiopia—not only in the main city, but all over the country.

**WW:** What's next?

**EAJ:** I will be documenting fashion in a few places I haven't visited yet. Also, I will be looking more into creating a story by studying and experimenting with the fabrics in my series "City of Saints VII" in a town where the first textile factory in Africa was built.

Eyerusalem Jirenga  
The City of Saints VII  
2017

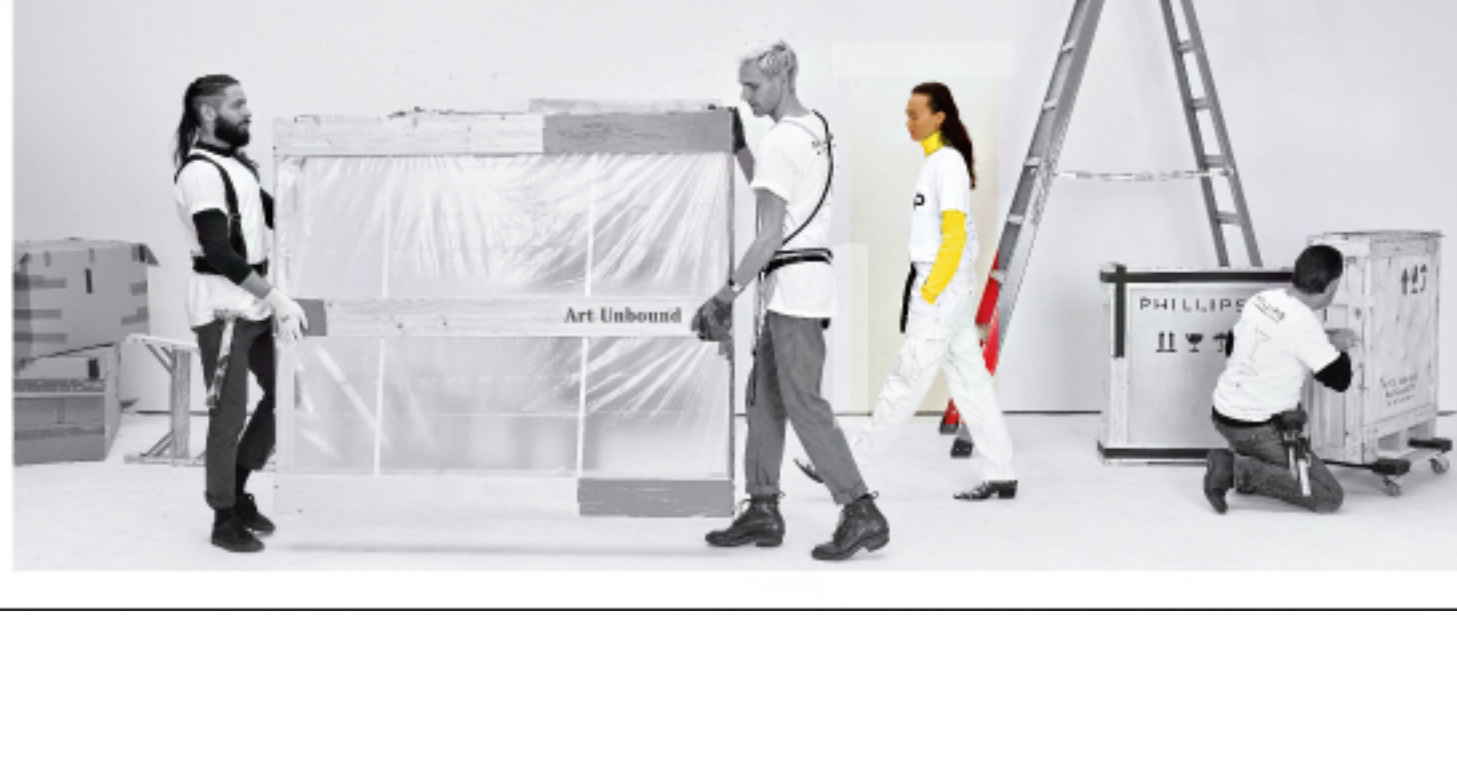
Courtesy of the artist and Addis Fine Art.

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