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Art Talk: Photojournalist Michael Tsegaye's U.S. Exhibit 'Crooked River'

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(Image by Michael Tsegaye)

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By Tadias Staff

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New York (TADIAS) – When asked in a 2011 Tadias interview about what good photography is, Michael Tsegaye — whose upcoming U.S. exhibition 'Crooked River' is set to open at Cleveland Print Room in Cleveland, Ohio this month — had quoted the French art critic Jacques Leenhardt saying: "Photography is best when it emulates poetry," portraying "not only the complex and problematic reality of the outside world, but also the way a person's eye has seen it. It shows a person's self-expression, a person becoming the poet we all have within us."

"I think this is a very true statement," Michael added.

In his own right, for the past several years, the Ethiopian photojournalist has been creating lyrical images inspired by his surroundings in Ethiopia and elsewhere, documenting whatever captures his eye at a given moment and exhibiting his work at numerous venues both locally and internationally while leaving the reactions and imaginations to the rest of us.

Many transformational events have taken place in Ethiopia since Michael Tsegaye shared his artistic philosophy with us in a Q&A eight years ago. The New York Times followed up with him in 2014 noting that "He captures sweeping panoramas, of markets springing up along newly built roads, or small details, like the cracked images on gravestones being moved to make way for development, or the rapidly disappearing communities in Addis Ababa that have been gentrified with new high-rises." At the time Michael had astutely said: "I know the city is going to be different in 10 years. It's going to be a memory for me, these pictures. You know the saying, 'You don't know what you have until it's gone?' That was in my mind when I took these pictures. I tried to work with that."

'Crooked River'

For his show in Cleveland, which is scheduled to open on June 21st and remain on display through August 3rd, the Cleveland Print Room Gallery has announced that Michael, who is currently their Creative Fusion International Artist-in-Residence, "will transform the gallery into the Cuyahoga River and its crooked bends from aerial photos and photographs from the riverbed."

The Cuyahoga River in Ohio is best known for helping to launch the environmental movement in the United States in the late 1960s after the water shockingly "caught fire" due to high levels of pollution. According to the announcement: "As part of the lead up to the 50th anniversary of the Cuyahoga River catching fire on June 22, 1969, the Cleveland Foundation's Creative Fusion: Waterways to Waterways Edition will bring together a group of international and local artists to focus on projects that connect the regenerative efforts for the Cuyahoga to global waterways."

Below is a brief bio of Michael Tsegaye from his website:

"Born in 1975, Michael Tsegaye lives and works in Addis Ababa. He received his diploma in painting from Addis Ababa University's School of Fine Arts and Design in 2002, but soon gave up painting after he developed an allergy to oil paint. He subsequently found his real passion in photography and has made of it not only a profession, but a way of expressing a very particular voice."

"As a photographer I try as much as possible to escape being pigeonholed. I place myself among my peers (photographers and painters) across the world," Michael says. "While the spirit of my culture — its traditions in music, poetry and literature — informs my photography, my goal is that of any artist: to understand my life and standpoint in the 21st century, and express these through art."

If You Go

CROOKED RIVER, AN EXHIBITION BY MICHAEL TSEGAYE

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