

Noted — Art

## Five Questions For Addis Fine Art



*Hands* by Keven Amfo

In a short five year span, Rakeb Sile and Mesai Hailekul have grown their Ethiopian gallery, Addis Fine Art, into a powerhouse. In addition to leading the gallery scene in Addis Ababa, they have participated in every significant global art fair and have now opened a London outpost at Cromwell Place.

We spoke with her about running a bi-continental business, and artist Tizta Berhanu whose work is currently on view in their Addis Ababa location.

### *Why was it important for you to open a location in London? Will Addis Fine Art expand to other countries in the future?*

Addis Fine Art was born from profound expertise in Ethiopian contemporary art and artists and the will to activate Ethiopia's professional art infrastructure. We aimed to create a leading gallery space in Ethiopia and an international platform for artistic production, both locally and in the diaspora. This is why it has always been essential for us to establish our gallery in Ethiopia before anywhere else.

Cromwell Place is the main reason we chose London to launch our second space. It is a very unique concept, and it's been on our radar since it was just an idea in 2015. London is closer to international collectors, and together the two spaces link a complete view. Also, the concept of housing multiple art galleries under one roof – in such a culturally rich part of London – has enabled us to be in the epicentre of one of the most exciting art scenes in the world. We hope that the variety of galleries and art world business that Cromwell Place has selected will push us toward more exciting conversations, projects and collaboration, as we will be a part of the much wider art world community.

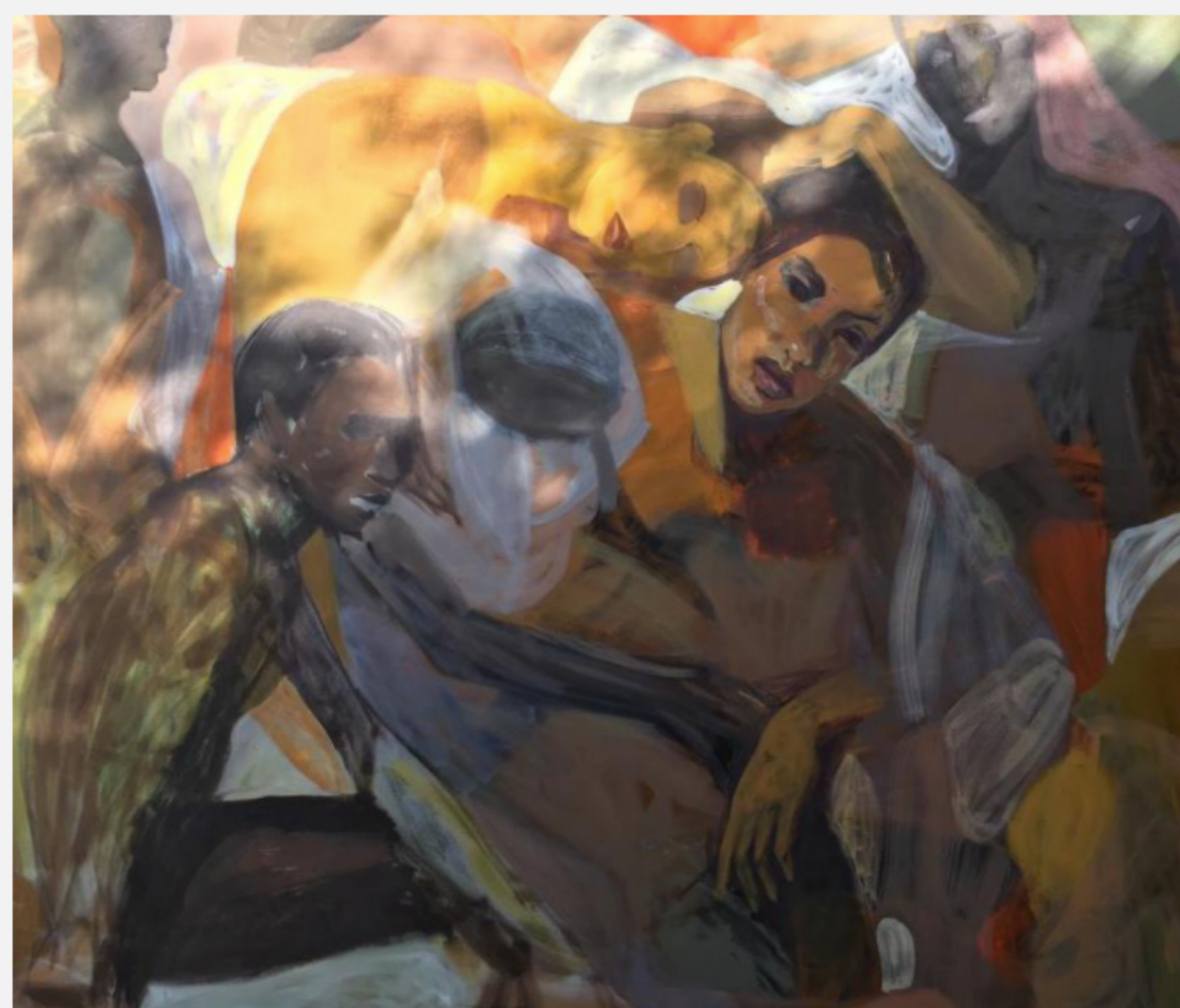
Before AFA, Mesai owned a gallery in Los Angeles California, which operated between 2005-2009. As Mesai knows this area already, it is definitely a location on our radar for the future.



standards. Locally, the gallery has created a gold standard in exhibitions, and this has enabled us to cultivate the local collector base. It has always been important to us to build the art value at home and keep works on the continent in the process. At the Addis Gallery, the cultural connection is already present between artwork and collectors, whereas we are usually introducing something entirely new in London. There are different dialogues taking place, but the curatorial rigour is consistent throughout.

### *When did you first discover Tizta Berhanu's work and begin supporting her practice?*

Mesai and I have worked together since 2013, and even before we physically opened the gallery five years ago, Tizta was a part of the wish list of artists that we'd like to work with and support. She has been on our radar from the beginning, and we have been watching her since she graduated from the Alle School of Fine Art. However, we didn't start working together until January 2019. We have an annual exhibition at our Addis Ababa gallery called Addis Calling, where we select new artists to appear in a group show. She appeared in this in *Addis Calling III* in January 2019 and was received so well that we haven't stopped working with her since.



### *What is unique about Tizta's paintings?*

The main reason that Tizta caught our attention was because of how she communicates emotional complexity through colour. She has always chosen mature concepts and never shies away from their depth. The emotional life is rarely predictable, and she portrays this multifaceted nature in a uniquely honest and raw way. This approach to painting was interesting to us, especially from someone so young. Since the pandemic hit, we've found that these concepts are even more relevant and nostalgic for people as we all endure painful distance from our loved ones.



### *What upcoming shows can we look forward to in the remainder of 2021 at Addis Gallery?*

Like all businesses, the pandemic has put everything in flux. As mentioned before, we have an annual show in our Addis Ababa gallery titled 'Addis Calling'. This exhibition showcases emerging talent, and we hope to do another one this year as we had to cancel it last year. We appear in Vortice, a virtual exhibition platform this month. We hope to do a virtual presentation of Heber and also appear in their London Collective. We also have plans to showcase more shows at Cromwell Place once the venue opens again and are scheduled to appear in art shows such as Art Dubai, Frieze and Armory. The pandemic has taught us to be flexible so we can only wait and see!

*All paintings by Tizta Berhanu.*

On 5th February, Quintessentially's Art Patrons will be journeying virtually to Addis Ababa to visit Tizta's studio and view her show at Addis Fine Art.

For further information on becoming an Art Patron, please contact us [here](#).