The Rising Stars of Ethiopian Photography

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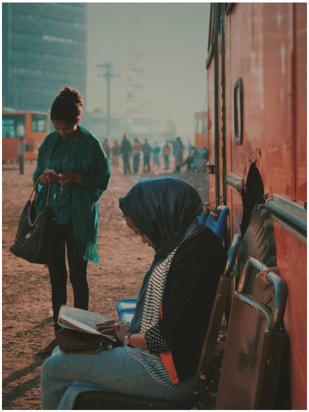
Ethiopia's enormous capital, Addis Ababa, is currently undergoing unprecedented urban change. In the wake of gargantuan modernization work, a new generation of photographers is jumping energetically on this evolving subject: the city and its people.

Internationally renowned Ethiopian photographer Aïda Muluneh had foreseen that Addis Ababa would become a photography hub. In 2010, she launched the Addis Photo Festival, an opportunity for a new generation of photographers to re-appropriate the image of a country too often photographed through a Western prism.

There is no official photography school in Ethiopia, and few exhibition spaces. Hence personal initiatives are what mainly get things moving. Photographer Maheder Haileselassie, for instance, founded the Center For Photography in Ethiopia, a learning platform for emerging photographers.

The latter favor street photography, grew up with social media and the profusion of images, which has influenced their approach. They are the main witnesses to the profound transformations of their country. *Blind* has selected six of these thirty-and-under photographers you will most definitely want to follow.

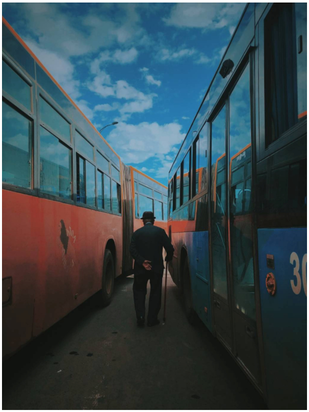
Amanuel Tsegaye: the early riser



© Amanuel Tsegaye

"Although Addis Ababa is chaotic and has bustling streets, most of my work zooms in on that chaotic scene and finds the intimate moment in its midst," explains Amanuel Tsegaye, a 24 year-old street photographer who mostly shoots on an iPhone, and mostly early in the morning.

A self-taught artist who became a master of light and shadow, his photographs portray veritable moments of grace. A young woman reading peacefully in an open-air bus station, a brother and a sister holding hands as they cross the street on their way to school, protected by a halo created by majestic trees and the low morning light.



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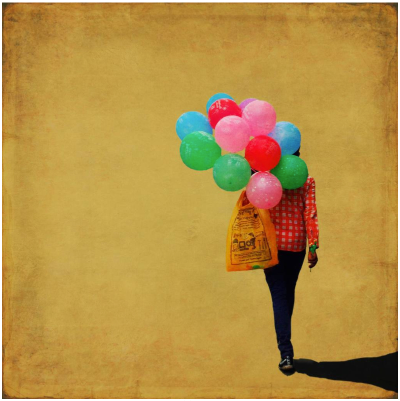
Girma Berta: the visual artist



© Girma Berta

A young photographer and darling of the press at the first edition of the AKKA African contemporary art fair in 2016, he runs the remarkable Instagram account Streets of Addis.

"Addis is what I see, what I breathe, and what I experience. I interact with it every day, and I identify myself with it wholly. There is always something rich worthy being captured (...) I can't choose what I take pictures of. What I see has an immediate and organic meaning - it just happens," says Girma Berta.

In his famous "Moving Shadows" series, he blends visual arts and street photography. He begins by capturing urban scenes, from ordinary people to street workers, which he then places in colorful backdrops. It's a way for him to illustrate "organic moments of everyday life and to offer my visual interpretation of these life experiences."

© Girma Berta

> "Sharing the stories of women and their significant part in society is rewarding."

Eyerusalem Jiregna: the fashionista

© Eyerusalem Jiregna

Eyerusalem Jiregna was a fashion design student in Addis Ababa when a local paper hired her as a photojournalist. She used that opportunity and new medium to expand her work as a fashion designer.

This is evidenced by her street photography, which is highly visual and colorful and which makes you wonder whether the subjects are the people she encounters or the colors and textures that dress and surround them." It's been about 5 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," she says.

In her series "The City of Saints VII," women and traditional fabrics are given a central role. "This series 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," the artist confides.

© Eyerusalem Jiregna

Abdi Bekele: the observer

© Abdi Bekele

"I began my photography journey by taking candid photos of everyday life in Addis. Having to suddenly relocate to a different town, photography became a way for me to document and manage the sudden changes in my environment," explains the young Abdi Bekele.

His first project, "Foundation," was a feminist series, which portrayed women working in the field of urban transformation in Addis Ababa, a metropolis known for its rapid changes. Initially, he intended only to document urban changes, until he visited construction sites and became aware of just how much work women were doing on construction sites.

"I saw women hammering walls, mixing and transporting cement through more than five story buildings, excavating rubble and relocating wooden pillars," the artist recalls. "I then set out to explore the role of women construction workers and their unseen contribution to the 'Foundation' not only of buildings but also society at large."

© Abdi Bekele

"Why? Why are you photographing?"

Hilina Abebe: the activist

© Hilina Abebe

Influenced by her father's social work and his black and white photos from the 1970s, Hilina Abebe has developed a body of work that's at the crossroads of documentary and portrait photography.

She spoke to us about Ruddy Roye, the Jamaican photographer and activist, whose work often focuses on social and racial inequalities." One of the most important questions I have learned from Ruddy Roye and his work is intentionality, having to ask the question 'Why? Why are you photographing?' A question that should be asked more often before framing an image. Even when we think we know; we must always ask."

More recently, she worked on a very personal series about her father. She approached it as a documentary subject, with a special emphasis on all the stories he has to tell as a man in his 80s.

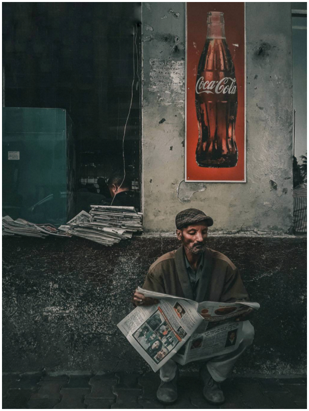
© Hilina Abebe

Sehin Tewabe: the newbie

© Sehin Tewabe

Twenty-year-old Sehin Tewabe was one of the youngest photographers exhibited at the 2018 Addis Photo Festival. Growing up in a large family, she initially approached photography in a private context, as the official recorder of all family celebrations. "I've always witnessed happy moments, which had to be saved and remembered in some way or another," she recalls.

Expanding beyond the family nest and taking her photography to the hectic streets of the Ethiopian capital, she followed in the footsteps of fellow street photographers she spotted on Instagram and began focusing on both the anonymous silhouettes, from behind or in profile, that populate her hometown, and the facial expressions of strangers she encounters here and there, like this crouching gentleman reading the newspaper with extreme concentration.



© Sehin Tewabe

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