

# 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair: Rakeb Sile | Addis Fine Art

on 29 September 2016.

In January 2016 founders Mesai Haileleul and Rakeb Sile opened a gallery in Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, called Addis Fine Art, aimed at creating a presence for Ethiopian artists in international spaces. Accumulatively the duo have twenty years experience in dealing and curating Fine Art from the region. *ART AFRICA* spoke with co-founder Rakeb Sile following a successful show at the FNB JoburgArtFair about their vision for the space and presentation at 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair, London.



Michael Tsegaye, detail of work from the series '*Chasms of the Soul: A Shattered Witness*', 2010. Archival Digital Print. Images courtesy of the artist and Addis Fine Art.

### **ART AFRICA: Please tell us a bit about the history of Addis Fine Art?**

Rakeb Sile: Addis Fine Art launched a new permanent gallery space in Addis Ababa in early January 2016. This marked a culmination of the work we started in 2013, where we provided curatorial and advisory services to international galleries and private collectors. There was an increased demand for engagement related to art from this region however, there was a distinct absence of entities to facilitate this exchange. With this in mind, Mesai Haileleul and I decided to open a gallery emerging from a local space with international reach.

### **Please tell us about the work you are showing at the upcoming 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair, London?**

At 1:54 London 2016 we are showing works by three artists; Wosene Worke Kosrof (b.1950), Michael Tsegaye (b.1975) and Leikun Nahusenay (b.1982).

Wosene Worke Kosrof is an established artist trained at the Addis Ababa School of Fine Arts, (BFA, 1972) and at Howard University in Washington, DC (MFA, 1980). He is an extremely important artist in the history of Ethiopian art. Over the last four decades he has created an internationally recognised artistic signature using the script forms of the Amharic language, the fiedel, as a core element in his paintings and sculptures. Drawing upon this age old script, Wosene often creates a new contemporary reality of dense compositions, using bold forms and a bright palette.



We are also very excited to show works by Michael Tsegaye. We think that he is the most important photographer of his generation working in Ethiopia today. Over the past decade, Tsegaye has documented the ever-changing physical and social landscape of Addis Ababa. We will be showing works from 'Chasms of the soul: a shattered witness' series, where Tsegaye explores the impermanent nature of seemingly permanent structures. Stunning images of photographs embedded in gravestones, show how as a result of time, those already buried continue to experience a second death; the gradual deterioration of their entombed identity. It is a physical, piece-by-piece annihilation that eventually wipes all memory of their previous existence, thus resulting in an absolute state of nonexistence. This work is part of a wider collection of works called 'Future Memories,' where Tsegaye has attentively recorded the wider distraction and redevelopment of Addis Ababa. Tsegaye was trained at the Addis Ababa School of Fine Arts (2002).

Finally, we are showing mixed media works by Leikun Nahusenay who's multi-discipline practice includes photography, painting, and sculpture. Nahusenay's work is an exploration of the world's opposing forces – light, dark; flesh, spirit; good, evil – and the futility of their reconciliation. He creates beautiful abstract portraits and colourful vistas using found objects, paint, paper, fabric and more. Nahusenay was trained at the Ale School of Fine Arts (2006).



Michael Tsegaye, detail of work from the series *'Chasms of the Soul: A Shattered Witness'*, 2010. Archival Digital Print. Images courtesy of the artist and Addis Fine Art.

**How important are fairs such as 1:54 in establishing connections, not only with collectors, but the broader ecology of the art world?**

Fairs such as 1:54 are very important to our programme. Our aim is to be a local space and international platform for artistic expression from Ethiopia and the region. This means we wish to strengthen our local collector base and exhibitions, but also to build a truly international following. Participating in international art fairs is a key component to building links with new collectors, museums, curators, press and patrons globally. Fairs such as 1:54 are very important to our programme. Our aim is to be a local space and international platform for artistic expression from Ethiopia and the region. This means we wish to strengthen our local collector base and exhibitions, but also to build a truly international following. Participating in international art fairs is a key component to building links with new collectors, museums, curators, press and patrons globally.

**What difference do you think there will be in the reception of the work in London, as opposed to your audiences back home?**

Most of the work we are showing will be new to a London audience and we hope people will be curious and engage with our presentation. We are also bringing new perspectives to the audiences back home because we display works that previously had limited opportunity to be seen. It's all about elevating the most interesting and important work both here and internationally.

**How do you see your involvement with the fair in relationship to the development of the arts in Ethiopia?**

We are extremely proud to be a pioneering local gallery with real international reach. Our participation in Armory Show in March and now 1:54 London, Joburg Art Fair and AKAA reflects the growing interest in art from the region. The number of local artists invited to show their work in prominent galleries and museums around the world is unprecedented. International collectors are noticing and buying, whilst local collectors are also spending significant amounts on artwork, amounts that were unthinkable just a decade ago. The growing public participation in art related events is also very encouraging. The youth of the city, in particular, are the most visible participants, and the most receptive to new forms of expression that challenge traditional norms. We are particularly excited by the new generation of artists from this region, such as Michael Tsegaye, Leikun Nahusenay, Tamrat Gezahegne, Robel Temesgen, Dawit Abebe, Girma Berta and many others who are influenced not only by their local contexts, but also use the exchange of international information and ideas as part of the creative process.

*This interview was first published in the September 2016 edition of ART AFRICA magazine, entitled 'BEYOND FAIR.'*

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