



Tesfaye Urgessa, *Hiatus 1*, 2017, Oil on canvas, 150 x 200 cm.

## TESFAYE URGESSA (b. 1983)

Born in 1983 in Addis Ababa, Tesfaye Urgessa is one of the most prominent contemporary diaspora Ethiopian artists. His current body of work *No Country for Young Men* delves into the immigration crisis in Africa and acts as a speaker for millions of muted individuals. He currently lives and works in Nürtingen, Germany. He will open a solo show in Addis Fine Art (Addis Ababa) on 28<sup>th</sup> December 2019, his first show in the country for over a decade.

‘Young people should not be bound to geographical boundaries whatsoever, but follow their own dreams and visions’, he stated in an interview in 2019. Deeply moved by the reality of millions of young African immigrants who risk their lives in search for a new home, Tesfaye initiated the series *No Country for Young Men*. Canvases and painted monotypes explore the individuality of the body through naked protagonists.

Tesfaye’s work roots in his childhood and his memories as a Ethiopian young man. Having studied under modern master Tadesse Mesfin, at the Alle School of Fine Art and Design, Urgessa connected with Ethiopian iconography. This will be, in years to come, one of the binding elements of his artistic production. In his own words, this is like ‘always having an Ethiopian accent, no matter what language I’m speaking’. Later on, over his travels in Europe, he encountered the heritage of German Neo-Expressionism and the London School, which he would incorporate to his imagery.

Story-telling and a kind of artistic activism is where Urgessa found a style of his own. The mute reciprocity between the observer and the observed shuffles the power dynamics and the notion of agency and race. The portrayed exceed the frame with their gaze, interrogating the viewer.

Objects and naked bodies co-habit the seemingly-chaotic space in hushed and mature colours. Each composition is unplanned. It comes from the very deep end of Urgessa's subconscious, where random images transcend to the outside world and onto the canvas. Brushstrokes become muscles, tendons, flesh and chromatic masses construct the rooms to contain the figures. The architecture of the scene is brief but enough.

In 2006, he received his BA in Art Education from the Alle School of Fine Art and Design in Addis Ababa, where he then lectured until 2009, moment when he emigrated to Germany. From then until 2014, Tesfaye undertook an MA at the Staatlichen der Bildenden Künste in Stuttgart under Prof. Cordula Güdermann, where he graduated with a distinction.

Among his most notorious solo shows are: *Atemzug*, Galerie Tobias Schrade, Germany (2019); *Oltre/ Beyond*, Le Gallerie Degli Uffizi, Florence, Italy (2018); *Auszeit*, Galerieverein Wendlingen, Germany (2017); *Free fall*, Galerie Evelyn Drewes, Germany (2017); *Body and Soul*, Sympra GmbH, Germany; and *Tesfaye Urgessa – Untitled*, Galerie K, Germany, both in 2015.

Some of his most important group shows comprise *ch halte dich festhalten*, Group exhibition (with Nina Raber Urgessa and Zoe liya Urgessa,) Schacher – Raum für Kunst, Germany (2019); *Von denen die auszogen*, State Galerie Villa Streccius, Germany (2019); *Fremdkörper*, Tesfaye Urgessa and Tillmann Damray, Schacher – Raum für Kunst, Germany (2016) and *Ethiopia Today*, Kunststation Kleinsassen, Germany (2016).

He has been awarded DAAD scholarship (2009-2011), the Camillo-Michele-Gloria-Preis, GasVersorgung Süddeutschland (GSV), Germany (2010), and the Prize of the state academy of Stuttgart, Germany (2014).