

## **TEWODROS HAGOS**

Tewodros Hagos' (b. 1974, Ethiopia) striking portraiture explores the way we've become desensitised to depictions of migrants' suffering. The artist uses the classical medium of painting to challenge us to look deeply into the faces of individuals affected by this ongoing humanitarian crisis. Hagos' moving portraits look back at us, appealing to our shared sense of humanity.

"Throughout the last decade, the whole world has witnessed the news and stories of migration atrocities on a nearly day-to-day basis, but as we are bombarded with imagery, it risks becoming normalized when, in fact, it remains one of the worst humanitarian crises of our time," commented the artist. "The question is: how long will we watch this human tragedy?"

With the palpable sense of isolation and displacement that permeates the poignant paintings of Hagos, they resonate deeply with the theme of our exhibition UNSETTLED, which includes five new works of the ongoing series "The Desperate Journey". This series initially started as a response to the artist's increasing realisation of the ineffectiveness of news stories and imagery to convey lived experience or complex truths. While many of the pictures shown by the media may provoke an immediate emotional response, they are often deliberately sensational in order to shock the viewer and over time the overload of such imagery risks normalisation of this tragedy.

"People don't realize that the migrant crisis is ongoing. The media focus switches from one direction to another, from the coronavirus to the Ukrainian war, while here in Ethiopia and Africa more generally, millions of people continue to be displaced as a result of conflict", says Hagos.

Through the classical medium of painting, Tewodros Hagos invites a slower, deeper kind of contemplation that counters the fast-paced consumption of digital media. His works not only elevate the crisis itself, but also the personal emotional experience of the individuals he paints. Significantly, his portraits convey a sense of strength as well as loss and grief. Yet, instead of pleading, the facial expressions are solemn and dignified. Hagos transforms the foil blankets, which are traditionally used in emergencies to keep people warm, into things of beauty, its gold and silver surfaces luminous in the darkness.

With his masterful craftsmanship, Hagos elevates his subjects to active agents of their own destiny. His compositions recall traditional European portrait paintings and the portrayal of grandeur, but instead of a lavish domestic setting, the vast, empty sky conveys an aching

sense of isolation and loneliness. In this way, Hagos creates a more complex, layered narrative that demands a deeper level of engagement, while questioning which individuals and events are traditionally recorded by history.

The contrast of the dark landscape with the luminosity of the metallic shine from the rescue blankets further heightens the unsettling atmosphere. Figures appear lost in the empty expanse of an unwelcoming hinterland. And yet, these works also possess an arresting, mournful kind of beauty that appeals strongly to a sense of shared humanity whilst simultaneously making us aware of our privileged position as passive spectators and challenging us to consider the realities that we choose to ignore.

Hagos is widely considered as one of the most promising artists of his generation. His works have been exhibited in Ethiopia, Belgium, Germany, Italy and the US. In 2017, he was awarded the grade of Chevalier of France's Order of the Arts and the Letters. In 2021, Hagos received the second prize award from the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture. The artist is represented by Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, and recently had an acclaimed solo exhibition at her Berlin space.

#### **SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS**

- 2022 Mirage, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, Berlin, Germany
- 2021 The Desperate Journey II, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London, UK
- 2020 The Desperate Journey, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London, UK
- 2020 Alliance Ethio-Francaise, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- 2019 Lela Gallery, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- 2017 Lela Gallery, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- 2016 Alliance Ethio-Francaise, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- 2015 LeLa Gallery, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- 2014 Alliance Ethio-Francaise, Dere Dawa, Ethiopia
- 2013 Ethiopia cultural centre, Los Angeles, USA
- 2013 Alliance Ethio-Francaise, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- 2010 Alliance Ethio-Francaise, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- 2007 Gallery BEK, Leuven, Belgium
- 2004 Gallery KN10, Antwerp, Belgium
- 2000 Kappelen cultural center, Kappelen, Belgium
- 1998 Studio am schloos, Berlin, Germany
- 1998 Futuro cultural center, Rome, Italy



## **SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS**

2018 Lela Art Gallery, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
2016 Lela Art Gallery, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
2015 Laphto Art gallery Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
2014 Lela Art Gallery, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
2012 Atelier Fine Art Gallery, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
2008 Studio am Scholes Berlin, Germany  
2007 Bibliotheek Permeke, Antwerp, Belgium  
2005 Bibliotheek Deurne, Antwerp, Belgium  
1998 Various venues in Antwerp, Belgium

## **AWARDS**

2021 The second prize award from the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture  
2017 "Chevalier of France's Order of Arts and Letters" from the culture and communication minister of France

## **EDUCATION**

1995 Addis Ababa University School of Fine Arts and Design