

"Trade Roots"
WITH

DAWIT ABEBE
FAIG AHMED
PHOEBE BOSWELL

PRIVATE VIEW 20th of March 2014
6:30 – 9:00PM

21st of March – 20th of April 2014

Our world is one of ever-changing motion, of evolution and revolution, of cultures mingling and swirling together, a constant stream of information hurtling around the globe. We leave things in our wake for others to pick up and make their own. We seek to explore new frontiers and ways of thinking. Cultures and rituals travel across continents, adapted by local cultures and leaving behind a trail revealing their origins. Communities embrace new technologies, the impact of a global world acting as a catalyst for social change – whether we are ready for it or not. Traditional icons and patterns see themselves metamorphosed. Within these parameters, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery is proud to announce a group show of new works by Dawit Abebe, Faig Ahmed and Phoebe Boswell. *Trade Roots* (21st of March – 20th of April) explores the ways in which cultures meld, adapt, and fuse together, through charcoal drawings, paintings and textile works. The artists examine the impact of new technologies, the deconstruction and reconstruction of tradition, and the evolution of ritual – and how these all blend with various cultural influencers to create new, unique, vibrant forms.

The work of Ethiopian artist Dawit Abebe examines belief systems, the search for knowledge, privacy, alienation, and materiality. Above all, he is interested in the impact of technology on human behaviour, as well as the impact of these technologies on the environment. In a sense, Abebe's practice probes the realm of our shared cultural and belief systems, with technology taking on the role of an 'other' culture. "My interest in this subject has been a gradual process of examination of people's lives over the last ten years," he explains. Abebe began to notice how social interaction has begun to move out of the public sphere and into the technological one, through computers and mobile phones, and it is this that he explores here with a series of paintings. "I've seen the decrease of the 'face to face' social aspect," he says. "How do these technologies affect our social life? What happens when we meet less frequently with 'real' people, and more often online?" Abebe also examines the impact of technology on societies, and how their introduction causes them to evolve differently. "In rural places, such as Ethiopia, Madagascar, or Kenya, people use

technology as a sign of wealth, such as owning a television. They adapt fast to new technologies, and their behaviour changes fast too."

For Azerbaijan-born Faig Ahmed, it is the artistic qualities of Azeri traditional carpets that he explores, disassembling their conventional structure to randomly rearrange the resulting components into sculptural forms. The neat geometry of an Oriental design is thrown into disarray – colours either become a muddle of static, or appear to bleed off the rug, pushing to shoot out of its edges. "The carpet is an icon of Eastern tradition," he explains. "It is canonical and has visual boundaries – my art is directed towards transforming these boundaries beyond any recognition. These carpets were more than simply visual patterns; they held a certain language and told stories. This tradition has fallen by the wayside, and in deconstructing and reconstructing them, in a way, I am creating new stories." Indeed, Ahmed examines the way in which tradition plays an important role within society and creates a self-regulating system. However, with the nature of today's fast-paced world and the reach of global modern culture, traditions and their 'non-written rules' often find themselves adapting rapidly. He destroys traditional stereotypes and creates new modern boundaries – the new, contemporary, sculptural form echoes the ways in which man can adapt to new technologies and influences, yet retain his intrinsic core values and cultural heritage without falling into dogma. "I was in search of something really impregnable," he says. "These carpets reflect my internal conflicts and my will to be free, to shake tradition and transcend its boundaries."

The series of large charcoal drawings that Phoebe Boswell has created for the exhibition has been inspired by the Maulidi ya Homu of Zanzibar. A Sufi tradition of rhythmic chanting with origins in the Middle East, it was brought to East Africa through the region's trade routes. This form of Maulidi now only exists in the Zanzibar Archipelago. While the chants were originally prayers to the Prophet, it has since become a cultural, rather than a religious, appropriation, its rhythmic movements echoing the waves and sailboats of the East African coast. "I became interested in the fact that this tradition only exists in Zanzibar, and in the notion of how the sharing, appropriating, and colonising of culture works," explains Boswell. "I'm also fascinated by the idea of shared systems of belief, and this to me represents a physical manifestation of that." As with much of her practice, these works have been in part inspired by Boswell's own intercultural background, growing up in the Middle East as the child of Kenyan-British parents. "I appreciate the multi-layered nature of post-global upbringings such as my own," she says, "and want to determine ways of exploring and conveying these multi-faceted narratives through my work, where a single drawing or a single screen film is not enough." The works are created in charcoal, carbon, and graphite, through Boswell's process of heavy layering and subsequent rubbing away of the medium – a reflection of the rhythmic nature of the ritual itself. "Like memory of an experience, or culture itself, [it] is revelatory in waves – the image comes and goes until completion," she says. "It's about ritual, and the coming together to engage in a spiritually uplifting act."

In the works of Abebe, Ahmed and Boswell, we see a complementary exploration of the foundations of our cultural and belief structures and the ways in which they operate in a state of continual flux. "I think we all share an intrigue into this idea of belonging, and what it means to be living in the world today," says Boswell. Whether the impact of technology on a rural society, or the appropriation and reappropriation of rituals and customs, or even the deconstruction of an Oriental carpet, there is a focus on the liquid nature tradition and culture – what do we hold on to, and what do we adapt? How do we, as humans, leave behind traces of what once was, what is, and what could be?

Trade Roots runs from 21st of March – 20th of April 2014 at
Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London

Information for journalists:

Dawit Abebe

Dawit Abebe graduated from the Addis Ababa University School of Fine Art and Design with a diploma in painting, sculpture, graphics, photography and industrial design. Since 2001, he has been a full-time artist in residence at the Habesha Art Studio in his native Ethiopia, and has also worked with UNICEF to hold workshops for street children in Arba Minch, Jinka and Addis Ababa. Solo exhibitions include *X Privacy* at the Alliance Ethio-Francaise, Addis Ababa (2012). Group shows include the touring exhibition *Silver Sea Cross-Ship* (2013-2014) as well as the display of the Habesha Art Collection at the National Museum in Addis Ababa (2014) along with exhibitions in France, the UAE, and the USA. He was also recently added to the Saatchi Collection. For more information, visit www.artecogallery.com.

Faig Ahmed

Born in Baku, Faig Ahmed graduated from the Sculpture Faculty at the Azerbaijan State Academy of Fine Art in Baku in 2004. Since 2003, he has been working with various media, including painting, video and installation. He is a Board Member of the YARAT Contemporary Art Space in Baku. Currently, he is studying the artistic qualities of Azerbaijani traditional rugs – he disassembles their conventional structure and randomly rearranges the resulting components of the traditional composition, then combines these fragments with contemporary sculptural forms. Recent solo exhibitions include *East in Twist* at Leila Heller Gallery, New York (2012) and *Actual Tradition* at Kicik Qalart Gallery, Baku (2012). Group exhibitions include *Love me, Love me Not* at the Venice Biennale 2013, with the show travelling to its native Azerbaijan this year. Ahmed's work was also included in the *At the Crossroads* auction at Sotheby's London in 2013, and he was shortlisted for the third edition of the prestigious Jameel Prize, organised by the Victoria and Albert Museum. He is currently exhibiting a residency show at the Cuadro Gallery in Dubai. For more information, visit www.faigahmed.com.

Phoebe Boswell

Born in Kenya in 1982 to a Kikuyu Kenyan mother and a British-born Kenyan father, Phoebe Boswell grew up in the Middle East and moved to London in 2000, where she now lives and works. She graduated from the Slade School of Art with a BA in Fine Art Painting, and later went on to study 2D Character Animation at Central St Martins. She has exhibited work at the Royal Academy, Bonhams Bond Street and the Mall Galleries, and had her first solo exhibition at the Bahrain National Museum with a portraiture and oral history project entitled *Bahrainona*. This exhibition, exploring the diversity of the island's population, culminated in a published book of the same name. Since she began to animate, Boswell has created animations for 12foot6, Wingspan Productions, Springshot Productions and BBC4, and her animation work has been nominated for various awards including Best Student Film in the

Bradford Animation Festival, Best Animation in Rushes Soho Shorts and Best Film twice in the British Animation Awards Public Choice. She has exhibited moving image installations at the Old Vic Tunnels and 500 Dollars, was nominated and shortlisted for the Art Foundation's Animation Fellowship, and was the first recipient of the Sky Academy Arts Scholarship in 2012. Boswell will also be exhibiting a moving image installation titled *The Matter of Memory* at Carroll/Fletcher Gallery in March 2014. For more information, visit www.phoebeboswell.com.

Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery

Kristin Hjellegjerde opened her gallery in south west London in June 2012 following her move from New York. The gallery showcases cutting-edge contemporary art from emerging and established international artists, with the central concern to create an intimate space in which an artist could present a coherent body of work within a focused environment. Drawing on her own international background, Kristin Hjellegjerde seeks to discover and develop new talents by creating a platform through which they can be introduced to local and international audiences and encouraging artistic exchange. Kristin Hjellegjerde also acts as an art advisor for both emerging private and corporate collectors. For more information, visit www.kristinhjellegjerde.com.

For further information and high-resolution images, please contact Kristin Hjellegjerde on khjellegjerde@mac.com.