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ARCHITECTURE

FASHION

DIRECTORY

Featured Artist: Dawit Abebe

March 1, 2016



Working in his signature acrylic and collage technique, Ethiopian artist Dawit Abebe creates striking, vibrant, larger-than-life portraits that raise questions about the often difficult relationship between history and technology, and the ways in which the two coexist today. With an interest in the realm of technology and its impact on human behaviour, Abebe has long examined the role that belief systems, as well as mankind's propensity to search for knowledge, have played on society – particularly in the fields of privacy, alienation and materiality.

As technologies advance and develop to bigger and better levels of sophistication, Abebe's interest has lain in the impact these technologies have on social interaction and human behaviour and – significantly – how they are perceived as signifiers of wealth. Ethiopia, like many developing countries, has struggled with the impact of technology and modernisation and its place within a long and rich local heritage and culture; it is at the demarcation at which the two meet where Abebe paints.

"I think the history of a country as well as that of a particular individual follow similar paths," he muses. "One can reflect the other, as microcosm and macrocosm – what affects an individual is often played out on a larger scale when it comes to a national issue." During a trip to a local market, Abebe found old school books and newspapers, prompting him to question the evolution of historical fact: it is an ever-changing entity rather than a fixed truth. Using these archival pages, Abebe's figures revisit their personal and cultural histories, facing their backgrounds both literally and figuratively.

Using small details as clues prompting the viewer to put the pieces together and complete the portrait – such as license plates as status symbols, varying age groups to emphasise the importance of learning from older generations – Abebe ultimately gives an intimate and private glimpse into one person's life, and thus a portrait of a culture in flux.

The Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery will be exhibiting new works by Dawit Abebe at VOLTA NY

More information can be found here.

VOLTA NY

2 - 26 March 2016

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