

tom///out

The Gentleman Who Lunches

GRASPING HANDS: EXITS, DAWIT ABEBE @ KRISTIN HJELLEGJERDE

EXHIBITION



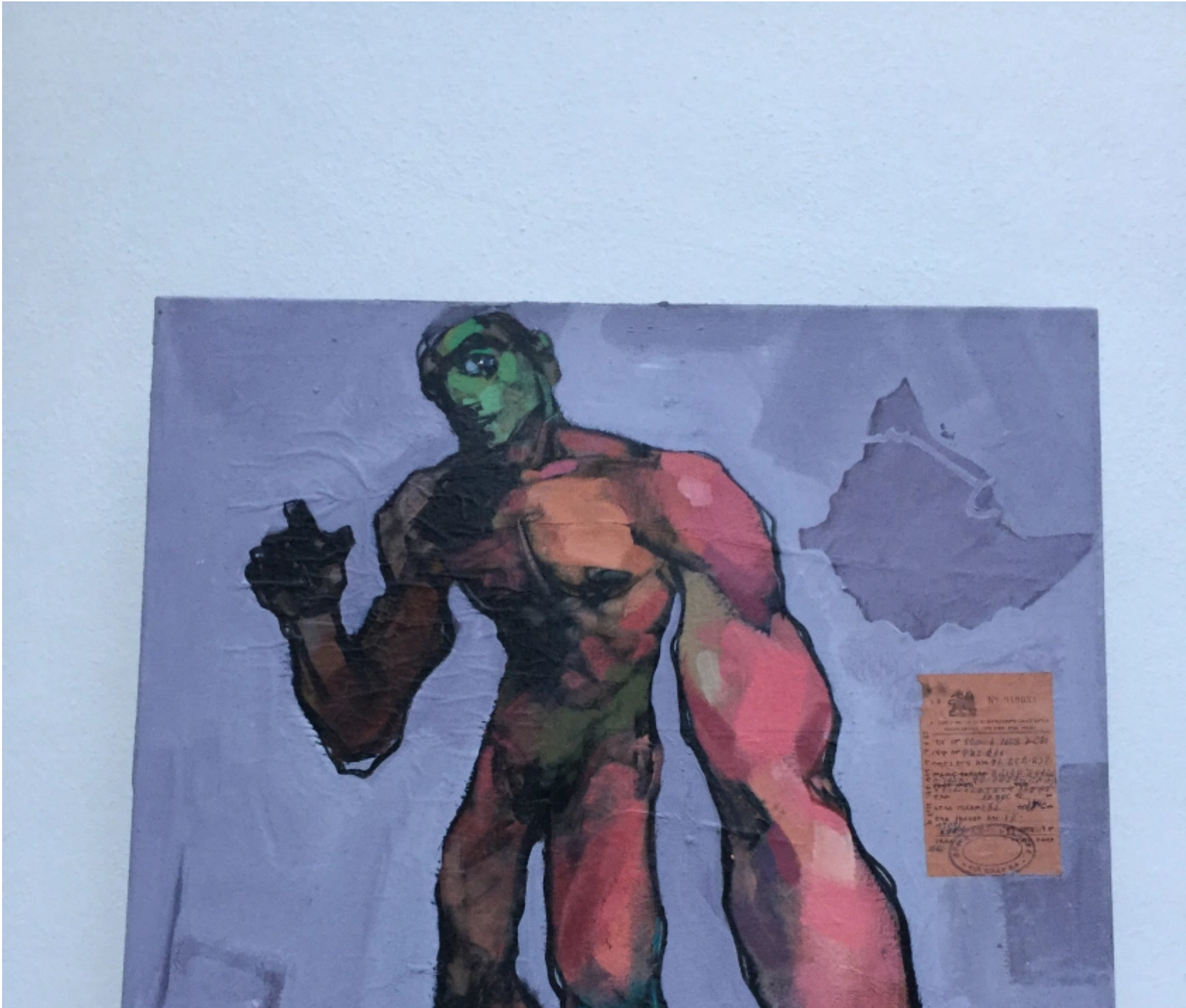
Once inside the door of an unassuming brick building just off of London Bridge Station, you'd be forgiven for guessing you had wandered into a paradisiacal Spanish or Greek villa, when in fact you have just entered the new gallery space of

Kristin Hjellegjerde (set, unfortunately, for renovation – the first item to go will no doubt be its signature arched sky-light ceiling, perhaps not the best complement to each exhibition's works, offering a constant conflict of excessive natural light). As a visitor rounds up the stairs into the main space, the striking image of a painted series of broad, massive backs, a gravitas of flesh spatially obliterating each frame, accosts the eye.





In these elementally brawn portraits, Ethiopian artist Dawit Abebe inscribes bodies with an overlay of insects, cd's, cassettes, masks and license plates with number schemes that reflect historically significant dates (a curious fact: Ethiopian calendars are consistently seven or eight years behind the Gregorian template). His process commences with a foundation of pages from educational exercise books placed upon the canvas , signalling the underlying rigour and regulation of “authoritative” teaching, over which he creates tense (mostly male) narratives of more compositionally base societal influences (music, cars, jewellery-tokens of power and position).





His “long-hand” series portrays naked, looming male figures rampaging over landscapes, a grotesquely disproportioned arm reaching out in an annihilating grasp, in some cases an obscenely gleaming gold watch affixed to wrist. The position is one of absolute dominance, crushing the earth with impunity and privilege—all around, a collage of eminent figures from the worlds of politics, sports and entertainment gather along the horizon, unobtrusive but present, avatars of aspiration.





Abebe teases out the pressures, the infestation of cultural myth and fable upon both body and mind, its sometimes regrettably disreputable absorption into character and behaviour, the destructive ways in which it may manifest into a great and tragic misconception. These energised images explode a study of the exploitative uses to which tales are put, how they are consumed by a population, and the consequences for a culture. *Exits* closed on 14 March and was one of the final exhibitions I attended before lockdown



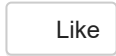
<https://kristinhjellegjerde.com/exhibitions/130/overview/>







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