

8 Ethiopian visual artists to watch

From established masters to emerging generations, we've picked a selection of the country's many current artistic talents

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Wendimagegn Belete: Untitled (2020) / Image: Etter Tørke, RAM Gallery

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Tesfaye Urgessa

This Ethiopian-born, young modernist based in Germany is already garnering widespread attention. Urgessa's electrifying works are influenced by his former Alle School of Fine Arts and Design teacher, Tadesse Mesfin, alongside hints of German Neo-expressionism, creating a visual language that's all his own. His imagery speaks to issues surrounding the power dynamics of identity, race and culture, and his signature muted flesh-toned bodies force the viewer to confront their preconceptions and unpack deeper truths.



Dawit Abebe / Image: Michael Tsegaye

Dawit Abebe

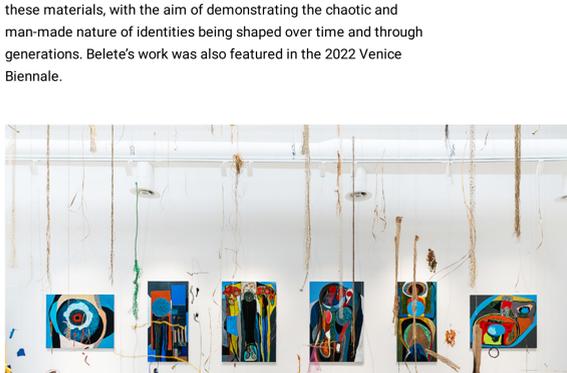
Born and raised in Addis Ababa, this artist has been pushing boundaries for over 12 years. Abebe's multimedia visual experiments present the audience with social questions and criticisms designed to stimulate reflection. His layered works often intertwine multiple subject matters and styles, such as historical observations juxtaposed with irreverent illustrations, all to confront memory and meaning. Abebe's provocative work has also been added to the permanent collection at London's Saatchi Gallery.



Wendimagegn Belete: Your Gaze Makes Me (mixed-media installation, 2021, 630 x 618 x 30cm) / Image: Pinchuk Art Center, Future Generation Art Prize

Wendimagegn Belete

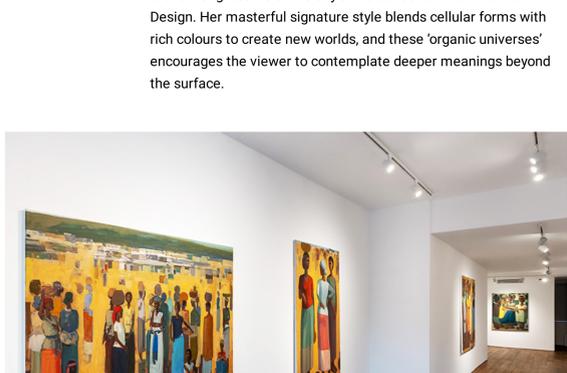
Belete's large-scale mixed-media canvases explore collective histories through storytelling, incorporating a range of materials, such as archival letters, maps, photographs and historical documents. Various techniques and treatments are applied to these materials, with the aim of demonstrating the chaotic and man-made nature of identities being shaped over time and through generations. Belete's work was also featured in the 2022 Venice Biennale.



Merikokeb Berhanu at Venice Biennale (install photography 2022) / Image: Courtesy of the artist and Addis Fine Art

Merikokeb Berhanu

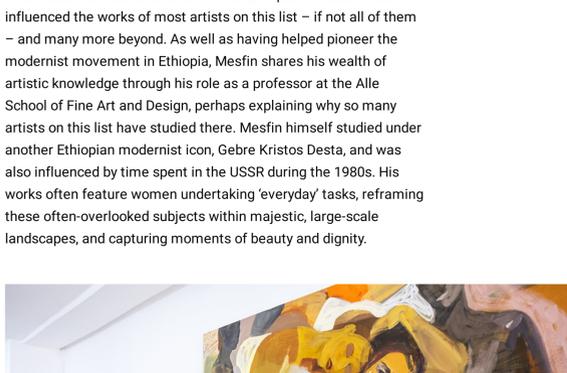
Born in 1977 and raised in Addis Ababa, painter Merikokeb Berhanu is another graduate of the city's Alle School of Fine Arts and Design. Her masterful signature style blends cellular forms with rich colours to create new worlds, and these 'organic universes' encourages the viewer to contemplate deeper meanings beyond the surface.



Tadesse Mesfin: Column of Rhythm (Addis Fine Art, install photography) / Image: Lucy Emms, courtesy of the artist and Addis Fine Art

Tadesse Mesfin

This modernist master and icon in the Ethiopian art scene has influenced the works of most artists on this list – if not all of them – and many more beyond. As well as having helped pioneer the modernist movement in Ethiopia, Mesfin shares his wealth of artistic knowledge through his role as a professor at the Alle School of Fine Art and Design, perhaps explaining why so many artists on this list have studied there. Mesfin himself studied under another Ethiopian modernist icon, Gebre Kristos Desta, and was also influenced by time spent in the USSR during the 1980s. His works often feature women undertaking 'everyday' tasks, reframing these often-overlooked subjects within majestic, large-scale landscapes, and capturing moments of beauty and dignity.



Tizta Berhanu: Héber (2020, installation view) / Image: Courtesy of Eyerusalem Jiregna, the artist and Addis Fine Art

Tizta Berhanu

Born in Addis Ababa (where she currently still lives and works), Berhanu is another former student of Tadesse Mesfin's at the Alle School and has since exhibited in London, Dubai and galleries around the United States. Trained as a figurative painter, her emotive figures are often engulfed in chromatic backdrops, considerably created with colours and tones that vary between muted and vibrant.



Hana Yilma, Hair salon in Addis Ababa #2, 2022

Hana Yilma Godine

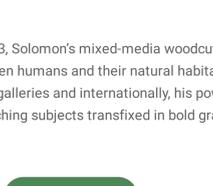
Godine's colourful collages explore the roles of women across time and place, unpacking emotional histories and complicated tropes. Her elongated figures are inspired by Ethiopian iconography and influenced once again by her teacher, Tadesse Mesfin. Materials such as archival newspapers are often paired with layered treatments in an attempt to represent the environmental and temporal effects of storytelling.

Ephrem Solomon

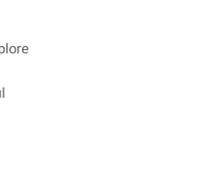
Born in Ethiopia in 1983, Solomon's mixed-media woodcuts explore the relationship between humans and their natural habitats. Exhibited in Ethiopian galleries and internationally, his powerful works feature eye-catching subjects transfixed in bold graphic environments.

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