

Saving mother earth with Abebe's brushing of 'Quo Vadis?'

By Taudeen Sowole | 30 April 2017 | 11:48 am



A painting from Dawit Abebe's Quo Vadis?

Remember Ethiopian artist, Dawit Abebe? His work was among the stunning pieces at Art Dubai 2017 Contemporary space.

The same Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery that showed Abebe at Art Dubai last month will be exhibiting the artist's works again.

This time, under the theme Quo Vadis?, from May 6-8, 2017 for private viewing, while the show continues till June 3, 2017 at Hjellegjerde Gallery, west London.

The exhibition, which is Abebe's third solo show at the same gallery, probes man's spiritual virility against the forces of nature. Adapting the Latin phrase Quo Vadis 'where are you going?', Abebe interprets contemporary concerns of the environment, specifically, the conflict of interest between high-tech infested urbanisation and natural habitation, perhaps as well as dwindling resources that may not be enough to sustain management of damaged environment. These are the pedestals on which Abebe is thematically asking: Quo Vadis?

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Among the works viewed via soft copies – received from Hjellegjerde Gallery – are those that continue Abebe’s collage portraiture of using back view of his subject to create suspense and dialogue. And seemingly of surreal flavour, Abebe in this exhibition sprinkles insects on the canvas in competitive space with human flesh. Sometimes the insects are depicted as deadly. As quite dramatic as some of the paintings are, the narrative of an environment that is struggling and competing for survival with its inhabitants is also thoughtful

Yes, graphics, the paintings are: Abebe’s rendition of environmental pillage, though goes as far as depiction of insects perching on flesh, but the artist’s vibrant brushing of acrylic on canvas provides an energy of aesthetics, even in a tragic narrative. In two series of bare back or torso and laced long jacket, the ‘Quo Vadis?’ paintings confirm an emerging generation of African artists with great depth of skill in visual expressionism.

Born in 1978, and graduated from the Addis School of Fine Art and Design, at Addis Ababa University with a diploma, Abebe is an artist whose brush strokes empathise with mother earth and speaks volume about gross insensitivity of policy makers in most urban cities, particularly of African countries. “My current work is about the destruction and extinction of living organisms (whether small or big) in the name of modern life, peace and prosperity,” explains Abebe. “Quo Vadis? is, above all, about a loss of equilibrium, deriving from sterilising and at the same time polluting mother earth.” He argues that “Man creates his own tragedy by systematically divorcing himself from nature.”

In its statement, the gallery notes that “These works continue Abebe’s signature use of layering old school exercise books beneath acrylic paint to create a textured background.

Excerpts from gallery statement: “Hjellegjerde Gallery showcases cutting-edge contemporary art from emerging and established international artists, with the central concern being to create an intimate space in which artists can 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 by allowing for artistic exchange. Kristin Hjellegjerde also acts as an art advisor for both emerging private and corporate collectors.

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