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Kubatana – African contemporary art exhibited in Norway

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Reading Time: 5 minutes

Kubatana allows us to go further with our series. How contemporary African art is changing the game for Africa in Europe? For sure, an exhibition showcasing contemporary African visual artworks in Norway is significant. Introducing Norwegians to the African contemporary vibrant artistic scene will at least raise more curiosity about Africa.

Kristin Hjellegjerde, Kubatana's curator

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musées
museum
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Kristin Hjellegjerde – photo: C.K. Amanie Magazine

Kristin, native from Norway is an art evangelist. She has founded the Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery in London in 2012. As a self-made art entrepreneur, she has been learning by doing. It is this passion who led her to develop the Kubatana exhibition.

After Documenta 2012 she has been encouraged to work with African artists. At this time spotlights were not as strong as they are now on contemporary African art. Dawit Abebe and Ephrem Solomon were the first artists she interacted with.

Kristin puts an emphasis on creating personal relationships with the artists she collaborates with. It is certainly inspired by the community feeling she observed, while she travelled throughout Africa.

Kubatana. "Togetherness" in Shona, language from Zimbabwe.

This matters a lot to African artists. They pay more attention to how they are treated, especially with this enthusiasm for Africa in general. " *Africa is the future* ". As far as it is, Africa has already been the past and the present as well.

KH Gallery is not focusing on contemporary African art only. Therefore, it was important to keep a wide and diverse approach to Kubatana. Also, this artistic diversity embodies the various aspects of Africa.

The exhibition idea started to grow in Kristin's head about 3 years from now. Drawing a business plan, contacting people, travelling to meet the artists, researching, pitching the project...

The support of Lars-Andreas T. Kristiansen, Vestfossen Kunstlaboratorium director has been significant in this project.

Vestfossen Kunstlaboratorium, Kubatana's host





The Vestfossen Kunstlaboratorium has been established by the artist Morten Viskum and opened to the public in 2003. It is an art dedicated location, opened from May to September. The city of Vestfossen surrounded by nature is a perfect place to be inspired, create and vibrate for art. Indeed,



it is made to be a laboratory for contemporary art, the meaning of *kunstlaboratorium*.

Now, close your eyes and imagine a space of 1200m split on 4 floors.

This space has been dedicated to Kubatana for 5 months in Norway. On top of that, The Norwegian *Minister* of Culture and Equality, Trine Skei Grande attended to the opening. The Norwegian media didn't miss the occasion either.

All of this underlines how seriously this exhibition has been considered and certainly the unicity of Kubatana.

Even without visiting the Vestfossen Kunstlaboratorium, Norwegian people would have heard about it. From now on, they have an updated picture of the diversity and the richest of contemporary visual African art. Changing Africa's narrative.

Africa First, Gallery 1957 and The Museum of African Contemporary Art Al Maaden (MACAAL) have collaborated to bring various pieces of art to Norway.

Meet Dawit Abebe, from Ethiopia





Dawit Abebe – photo: C.K. Amanie Magazine

Kubatana has been playing a key role in changing Africa's narrative in Europe. Some pieces of art from this exhibition are questioning identity, global connection and perspectives. Dawit Abebe, an



Ethiopian multi-disciplinary visual artist, has addressed it.

Dawit Abebe has definitely inspired Kristin in building up Kubatana.

Despite his wide international experience, he is still living and creating in Addis Ababa.

Actually, several of the artists of the exhibition live in their native country. It is an interesting perspective to show. Talented African people live on the continent and contribute to its present and future. Questioning the vision on migrations from Africa.

Dawit graduated from the Alle School of Fine Art and Design at Addis Ababa University. Among several disciplines, he has been trained in painting, sculpture, graphics, photography and industrial design.

Then, he founded the Habesha Art Studio.

The Ethiopian artist is a societal contemporary observer who reports what he sees in his artwork.

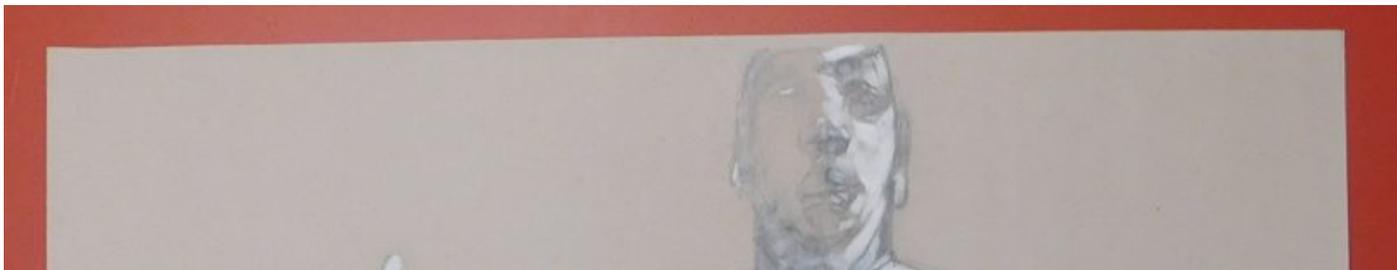
Dawit's first trip outside of his country was in Kenya, then Madagascar. He said "it has opened my eyes. I've been wondering more and more Who am I? What is the structure of all of this? How are we all connected?". The more he has been travelling in and out of Africa, the more he has been capturing similarities.

In the Occidental world, everyone is aware of the globalization, even in popular culture and art. However, it is often forgotten there, that Africa is also engaged in it.

Mutual identity puts it under the spotlight.

Dawit Abebe kindly explained to us the concept of his piece.

Mutual identity







Mutual Identity by Dawit Abebe – photo: C.K. Amanie Magazine

The giant is overlooking all the characters. When you look at them closely, you realize that they are famous people. They are all people seen on TV, everywhere in the media, on the internet.

African people may not be able to physically travel as much as they would like, but they widely do it via the Internet. So, Queen Elisabeth II, Angela Merkel or Kelly Rowland are all somewhat part of their daily life.

The artist has chosen to represent them at the bottom of the piece in small size. “They are as human as everyone, at the end. They are not super-human or more important than anyone, as it is often thought.” says Dawit.

The giant symbolises the global inter-connected contemporary society. It can be seen as a real person or an idea, a concept. Let your mind inspire you!

This piece of art matches one of the fundamental element of contemporary art. Observing, questioning, describing the modern world.

All our visuals of Kubatana are available on our Instagram account. Watch it in highlighted stories and on IGTV.

The exhibition is about to close now, but it has definitely opened a new era for contemporary art and Africa in Norway. The next step for Kubatana may be the USA! Keep your eyes open.



How contemporary African art is changing the game for Africa in Europe is still an ongoing topic on Amanie magazine.

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This blog is edited by Amanie. Amanie is a multilingual African and Caribbean Cultural media.

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