

DAWIT ABEBE | Ethiopia

"My inspirations come from the stories, fleeting moments, social, political and human-technology interactions – be them constructive or destructive – which, in turn I reflect on in my art by posing them as questions. A sort of social criticism, if you will, my senses and artist's instincts are drawn to that which I can experiment with, and then process into works of art that I hope will draw questions in myself, as well as society in general."

Dawit Abebe is a contemporary artist born in 1978 and raised in Addis Ababa, where his early fascination with drawing and visual storytelling developed into a lifelong artistic practice. He graduated in 2001 from the Alle School of Fine Art and Design at Addis Ababa University, earning a diploma that encompassed painting, sculpture, graphics, photography, and industrial design. This multidisciplinary training continues to shape his approach, allowing him to move fluidly across media while maintaining a strong painterly language.

Abebe's work is characterised by vibrant and energetic colour palettes that often contrast with the complexity of his subject matter. Through layered compositions and symbolic imagery, he reflects on contemporary environmental and social concerns, particularly the tensions between rapid technological urbanisation and humanity's evolving understanding of progress. His practice explores how development reshapes both landscapes and identities, balancing optimism with critical reflection.

In 2001, Abebe founded the Habesha Art Studio in Ethiopia, where he remains a full-time artist-in-residence. Alongside his studio practice, he has been actively engaged in educational and community initiatives, collaborating with organisations such as UNICEF to conduct creative workshops for street children in Arba Minch, Jinka, and Addis Ababa, reinforcing his belief in art as a tool for dialogue and empowerment.

Over the past two decades, Abebe has exhibited extensively across Africa, Europe, and the Middle East. His work has been presented at venues and events including Trade Roots and Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery in London, Cutlog Art Fair in Paris, Al Bastakiya Art Fair in Dubai, the East Africa Art Biennale in Tanzania, and East African Encounters by Circle Art in Nairobi. His artworks are part of numerous international private and public collections, among them the Chazen Museum of Art (USA), the Barjeel Art Foundation (UAE), the Saatchi Collection (UK), and the Fondation Gandur pour l'Art in Geneva.

In 2019, Artnet recognised Abebe as one of the two most important artists working out of Ethiopia today, and in 2021 he was featured in *African Artists: From 1882 to Now*, published by Phaidon, further consolidating his position within contemporary African art discourse.

Solo exhibitions:

2026

Dawit Abebe: The Residency Outcome, AKKA Project Venezia, Venice, Italy

2025

Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, Berlin, Germany

2023

"Hands Matter", Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London, UK

2022

"መጠን" The Balance of Things, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London

2021

Long Hands, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, Berlin

2020

EDIT, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London

2018

Mutual Identity, Addis Fine Art, Addis Ababa

LIMINAL THE AGE OF MOBILE-TY, gallery 68 projects, Berlin

2017

Solo Exhibition at Galerie Kornfeld, Berlin

"Quo Vadis?", Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London

Art Dubai, with Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, Madinat Jumeirah, Dubai

2016

VOLTA NY Art Fair, with Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, Pier 90, New York

2015

Background 2, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London

2014

Background 1, Lela Gallery, Addis Ababa

2012

X-Privacy, Alliance Ethio-Française, Addis Ababa

2010

Dawit Collection, Alliance Ethio-Française, Dire Dawa

2009

Pin Codes, Alliance Ethio-Française, Addis Ababa

2006

Green Women, Alliance Ethio-Française, Addis Ababa

Group exhibitions:

2026

Insistent Presence: Contemporary African Art from the Chazen Collection Palmer Museum, U Penn, USA

2025

Insistent Presence: Contemporary African Art from the Chazen Collection Carlos Museum at Emory University in Atlanta, USA

2023

Insistent Presence: Contemporary African Art from the Chazen Collection, Chazen Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin

1-54 NYC, with Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, New York City, USA

2022

Uprising, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, Schloss Görne, Germany

2021

1-54 London, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, UK

Facing The Sun, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, Schloss Goerne, Germany Blue Minds Exhibition, in aid of the Blue Marine Foundation, London, UK

2020

Devil's In The Detail, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London, UK 2019 Karachi Biennial, Pakistan Kubatana, Vestfossen Kunstlaboratorium, Norway

2018

1:54 Contemporary African Arts Fair, London, United Kingdom

Imago Mundi, Trieste, at Salone degli Incanti, Italy 2017

VOLTA13, Markthalle, Basel

Everything Exists Now, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London

Art Dubai, with Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, Dubai

2016

What about Africa?, Witteveen Visual Art Centre, Amsterdam 2015 Concerning the Internal, Circle Art Gallery, Nairobi

START Art Fair, with Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, Saatchi Gallery, London

Visibles/Invisibles: L'Afrique Urbaine et ses Marges, Foundation Blachere, Cape Town Art Fair, Cape Town

Pangaea II: New Art from Africa and Latin America, Saatchi Gallery, London

2014

Habesha Collection, National Museum of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa

Sound of Changes, Ethiopian Modern Art Museum, Addis Ababa

East Africa Encounters, Circle Art Agency, Nairobi

Circle Art Agency Auction, Nairobi

Silver Sea Cross-Ship, touring exhibition

Trade Roots, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London

2013

Art of Ethiopia, Sheraton, Addis Ababa
Cutlog Art Fair, Paris

2010

Alliances en résonance, Paris
Group Show, Saint-Sauveur
Al Bastakiya Art Fair, Dubai

2009

East Africa Art Biennale, Tanzania

2008

Langano 2, Alliance Ethio-Française, Addis Ababa
Langano 1, French Embassy, Addis Ababa

2007

Habesha Art Show, Lela Gallery, Addis Ababa
Group Exhibition, Alle School of Fine Art and Design, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa
Group Exhibition, Residence of First Secretary of USA Embassy
Addis Ababa Speak Africa, UNICEF, Addis Ababa
Zero Gravity, LELA Art Gallery, Addis Ababa
Engineering Tomorrow, Addis Ababa Faculty of Technology, Addis Ababa

2005

Ethiopia Remix, Alliance Ethio-Française, Addis Ababa
Group Exhibition, American Community School, Addis Ababa

2004

Group Exhibition, Addis Art Gallery, Los Angeles Friendship, Saron Studio, Addis Ababa
Photography Exhibition, German School, Addis Ababa
Habesha, Alliance Ethio-Française, Addis Ababa

2003

Body Corps, Alliance Ethio-Française, Addis Ababa

2002

Group Exhibition, Habesha Art Studio, Addis Ababa
Group Exhibition, Habesha Art Studio, Addis Ababa

2001

Group Exhibition, Residence of First Secretary of Spain Embassy, Addis Ababa

Residencies:

2026

AKKA Project Venezia, Venice, Italy

Awards and Nominees:

2021

First Place Award received from the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture

2017

Nominated "Chevalier of France Order of Arts and Letters"

Articles:

Abigail Brissett, "Ethiopia's Contemporary Artists: Reshaping Their Country's Politics", NKA: Journal of Contemporary African Art, November 2025,

<https://read.dukeupress.edu/nka/article-abstract/2025/57/78/403677/Ethiopia-s-Contemporary-ArtistsReshaping-Their>

Bethel Biru, "Inside the Layered World of Dawit Abebe", Merha Magazine, May 2025,

<https://merha.co/inside-the-layered-world-of-dawit-abebe/>

Metasebia Yoseph, "Ethiopian Visual Artists to Watch", Selamta, March 2023,

https://kristinhjellegjerde.com/usr/documents/press/download_url/1133/selamta_ethiopianairlines_com_inspiration_8_ethiopian_visual_artists_to_watch.pdf

Elizabeth W. Giorgis, "Monumental Bodies: The Work of Dawit Abebe", NKA: Journal of Contemporary African Art, November 2022,

<https://read.dukeupress.edu/nka/article-abstract/2022/51/48/319781/Monumental-BodiesThe-Work-of-Dawit-Abebe>

Ginanne Brownell, "How Ethiopian Art secured its spot on the world's stage", CNN, July 2020,

<https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/ethiopian-art-has-secured-its-spot-on-the-worlds-stage/index.html>

Philippe Godin, "1-54 New-York, les galeries européennes à l'assaut d'un nouveau marché", La Diagonale de l'art, May 2020,

https://kristinhjellegjerde.com/usr/documents/press/download_url/708/la-diagonale-de-l-art-1.54-new-york-les-galeries-europ-ennes-l-assaut-d-un-nouveau-march-lib-ration.fr.pdf

Hanou Amendah, "A Resilient Contemporary African Art Community faces the coronavirus storm", Obatala, April 2020,

https://kristinhjellegjerde.com/usr/documents/press/download_url/692/a-resilient-contemporary-african-art-community-faces-the-coronavirus-storm.pdf

"Grasping hands: Exits, Dawit Abebe @ Kristin Hjellegjerde", Tomoutblog, April 2020,

<https://tomoutblog.wordpress.com/2020/04/14/grasping-hands-exits-dawit-abebe-kristin-hjellegjerde/>

Tabish Khan, "The top 5 Art Exhibitions to see in London in March", FAD Magazine, March 2020,

<https://fadmagazine.com/2026/03/20/top-5-london-art-exhibitions-tabish-khan/>

Rachel Vancelette, "African Art on the rise in London: 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair", Urban Mindz, October 2019,

https://kristinhjellegjerde.com/usr/documents/press/download_url/656/african-art-on-the-rise-in-london-1-54-contemporary-african-art-fair.pdf

Touria El Glaoui, "Touria El Glaoui on Contemporary African Art, on 1-54 Art Fair, The Visibility of Art and Changing the Narrative", Art Breath, October 2019,

<https://artbreath.org/interviews/touria-el-glaoui>

Rebecca Anne Proctor, "Why Do We Need An Art Fair Dedicated To African Art?", Harpers Bazaar Arabia, October 2019,

<https://www.harpersbazaararabia.com/culture/art/art-fairs-and-events/154-contemporary-african-art-fair-answers-africas-call-to-be-seen>

Joanne Shurvell, "What To See And Buy At The African 1-54 Art Fair In London", Forbes, October 2019,

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/joanneshurvell/2019/10/04/what-to-see-and-buy-at-the-african-1-54-art-fair-in-london/>

Andrew Mulenga, "Mulling Over Art: Artnet "Intelligence Report" magnifies African Art Market", The Mast, September 2019,

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Rebecca Anne Proctor, "There Is No Such Thing as the African Art Market...Yet", ARTNET, September 2019,

https://kristinhjellegjerde.com/usr/documents/press/download_url/642/there-is-no-such-things-as-african-art-market-yet.pdf

"Kubatana - African contemporary art exhibited in Norway", Amanie Magazine, September 2019,

https://kristinhjellegjerde.com/usr/documents/press/download_url/647/kubatana-african-contemporary-art-exhibited-in-norway.pdf

Christelle Kamanan, "Kubatana - When African Art Illuminates Norway", Gova-Media, July 2019,

<https://www.govamedia.com/2019/07/21/kubatana-when-african-art-illuminates-norway/>

Ingrid Lien, "Kubatana", Kunst, June 2019,

https://kristinhjellegjerde.com/usr/documents/press/download_url/625/vestfossen.pdf

Ingrid Opstad, "Modern art laboratory in a historic setting", Scan Magazine, May 2019,

<https://scanmagazine.co.uk/vestfossen-kunstlaboratorium/>

Naomi Rea, "'African Art Is Here to Stay': Collectors, Were in a Buying Mood at the London Edition of the 1-54 Fair", ARTNET, October 2018,

<https://news.artnet.com/market/1-54-london-2018-1366906>

"Nine Must-See Exhibitions", After Nyne Magazine, May 2017,

https://kristinhjellegjerde.com/usr/documents/press/download_url/397/www_afternynemagazine_com_nine_must_see_exhibitions.pdf

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<https://www.africanartswithtaj.com/2017/04/saving-mother-earth-with-abebes.html>

Tajudeen Sowole, "Saving Mother Earth With Abebe's brushing of 'Quo Vadis?', The Guardian, April 2017,

<https://guardian.ng/art/saving-mother-earth-with-abebes-brushing-of-quo-vadis/>
