

PRESS RELEASE



(L) Robel Temesgen, *Untitled*, 2019, Acrylic, ink, permanent marker and tippex on paper, 33 x 33cm.
(R) Tegene Kunbi, *Untitled*, 2019, Acrylic on canvas, 30 x 20cm.
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RE:PUBLIC

Tegene Kunbi and Robel Temesgen

Preview: 5 June 2019, 6-8pm, and runs until 29 June 2019.

Circle Art Gallery, Lavington, P.O Box 66389 – 0800, Nairobi, Kenya

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Gallery hours are Monday – Friday 10am -5pm; Saturday 12pm-5pm. Or by appointment.
Closed Sundays and Public holidays.

Guzo Art Projects and Circle Art Gallery are pleased to present, 'RE:PUBLIC', an exhibition of new work by Tegene Kunbi (Ethiopian, b. 1980) and Robel Temesgen (Ethiopian, b. 1987), exploring the significance of everyday objects through painting and sculpture.

“What is the point of making a pot if it cannot hold water?”

Through painting and ceramic works, Robel Temesgen explores the material quality of *jebenas* (Ethiopian coffee pots) as a way to interrogate the current socio-political landscape in

Ethiopia. Boundaries and dysfunction, control and containment are depicted through delicate paintings and deconstructed ceramics. Taking recognisable motifs from *jebenas* as a starting point, colours and patterns are distorted and embellished in order to create dreamlike imagery that is at times unrecognisable from their original state. The artist recalls a childhood where the discarding of broken household utensils was rare and “even a potsherd [a broken piece of ceramic] was used to serve water for pets before it was recycled into a new one”. He appreciates their functional quality of making and containing coffee, their material quality of resisting the elements - water and fire - as well as their conceptual quality as carriers of culture. The work presented speaks to tradition and the ever-changing identities that form within a country. The works are a continuation from his *Floating Jebenas* series, which explored the increasing number of small scale coffee drinking spots around Addis Ababa, which can be found in diverse areas of the city, ranging from the tallest multipurpose malls to parts of the city that have been demolished to make way for new structural developments. These spaces, run by women and familiar in their rituals that include the burning of incense, provide safe environments for open political discussions across generations as well as a place where communal issues are resolved in rural settings. The paintings in the exhibition, often showing *jebenas* leaning to one side, are the artists’ reflections on the unstable ground Ethiopia finds itself in presently. Rapid urban development, the effects of smart technology and the increase in digital economy leads us to question the transformative position we find ourselves in individually and geopolitically.

This state of transformation is also explored in Tegene Kunbi’s abstract paintings. Colours are flattened then painted over again and again to create rich textural forms. Blocks of tones from his distinct palette are compartmentalised and reworked, forcing the edges to bleed into each other. At times, this confrontation makes it difficult to differentiate which tone was applied first, hidden and revealed once more. The artist draws on his cultural duality, his migration from Ethiopia to Germany and their respective rituals and rhythms that collide on the canvas. His creative process is evident, with textured marks that reflect the unpredictability in the ebb and flow of assimilation.

Together, the works speak to the creative act of migration and the potential for everyday objects to simultaneously contain culture, but also cause it to confront other forces surrounding it – namely rapid urban development, technology and the digital economy, which accounts for billions of connections between individuals and multinational companies through mobile devices and data. The result leads us to question how time changes our position, the values we hold, the choices we make and the tools we may need to reassemble ourselves as individuals and collectively.

Wanja Kimani, 2019.

Tegene Kunbi

Tegene Kunbi (b. 1980, Ethiopia) is an abstract painter based in Berlin. He graduated with a BFA from the Alle School of Fine Arts in Addis Ababa (2004), Ethiopia and did his MFA at the Universität der Künste Berlin (2011). His paintings often depict seemingly flattened landscapes that upon closer inspection, are composed of layer upon layer of subtle and vibrant tones of paint. In 2018, his work was part of the ‘Best of Galerie Ketken’ exhibition at galerie gerken, Berlin, Germany and featured in the 13th edition of the Dak’Art Biennale of Contemporary African Art, Senegal.

Robel Temesgen

Robel Temesgen (b. 1987, Ethiopia) received MFA in Contemporary Art from Tromsø Academy of Contemporary Art and Creative Criting, University of Tromsø, Norway (2015) and a BFA in Painting from Alle School of Fine Arts and Design, Addis Ababa University

(2010). His practice focuses on painting and encompasses elements of performance, installation, video and collaborative projects. In 2018, he had three solo exhibitions, *Confluence* (Tiwani Contemporary, London, UK) *Floating Jebenas* (Fendika Cultural Center, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia) and *Min Nebere?* (Modern Art Museum, Gebre Kristos Desta Centre, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia). He is a Lecturer at the Department of Painting, Alle School of Fine Arts and Design, Addis Ababa University.

Guzo Art Projects

In 2014, artists Wanja Kimani and Ephrem Solomon co-founded Guzo Art Studio in Addis Ababa in order to share information and ideas among local artists. In 2018, Guzo Art Projects was launched to develop further exchange by curating international exhibitions and events in borrowed spaces. In 2018, they hosted a group exhibition featuring works by Osborne Macharia, Dennis Muraguri and Ephrem Solomon at 508 Gallery in London and in 2019 participated in Art Dubai with a solo presentation of works by Wanja Kimani.