

ERMIAS MAZENGIA | EYOB KITABA  
**FROM SCRATCHES**

**H\*TEL DYSTOPIA**

Room #9/35



GOETHE-INSTITUT



## **Dystopia** |dis'tōpēə|

noun

an imagined place or state in which everything is unpleasant or bad, typically a totalitarian or environmentally degraded one.

The opposite of **Utopia** .

**DERIVATIVES**

**dystopian** adjective & noun

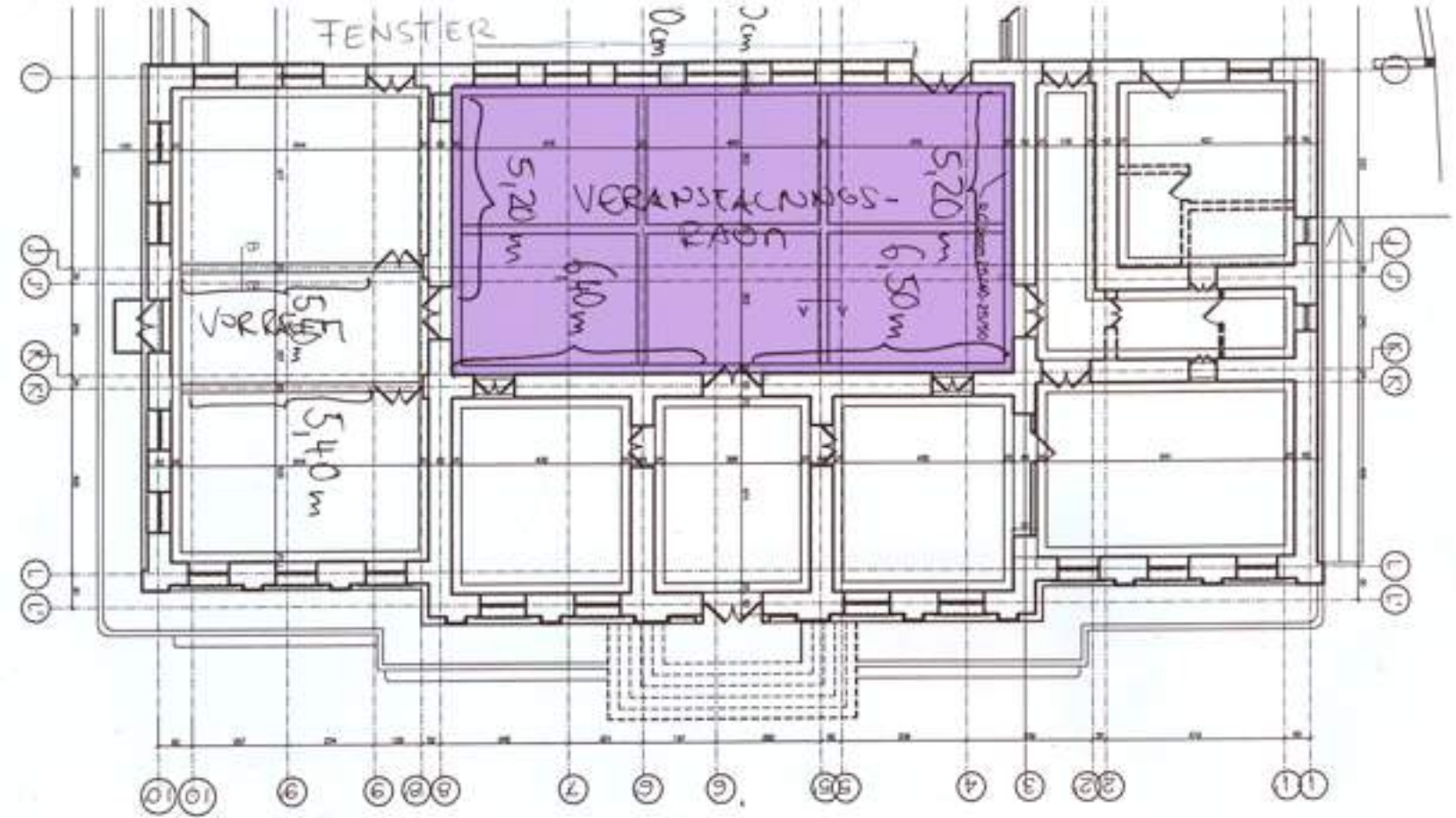
**ORIGIN** late 18th cent.: from **dys-** [bad] + **Utopia** .



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Published in conjunction with the exhibition  
H\*TEL DYSTOPIA, ROOM 9/35  
GOETHE-INSTITUT ADDIS ABEBA  
October 14-29 2010  
Addis Abeba, Ethiopia

**ATELIER** fine art gallery



«The avant-garde never gives up, and yet the limitations of antiquated models and the sites of resistance tend to push resistance into the void of disillusionment.»

*Nomadic Power and Cultural Resistance "The Electronic Disturbance",  
by Critical Art ensemble in Pavilion #13, p.136  
Ed. Pavilion & Bucharest Biennale, 2009*

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Following a successful presentation in March 2010 at the Dubai Bastakiya Art Fair, H\*TEL DYSTOPIA now reaches it's original birthplace - Ethiopian soil.

While the original show, Room #25/55 presented more than 100 pieces by 14 different artists, the current show focuses on two artists, Eyob Kitaba and Ermias Mazengia.

**Playing on the theme of the shifts and experiences we all encounter moving from one space to another H\*TEL DYSTOPIA opens new rooms with every exhibition. The opening of different rooms is an attempt to relocate and refocus art experiences, while striving to nurture the floor with multiple experimental strategies aimed at encouraging the formation of new collectors and active publics worldwide. The extreme flexibility of this platform addresses the issue of how artworks relate to their direct environment, a key to this enterprise that constitutes the essence of the proposition, not an outcome.**

*When entering Room #9/35, the viewer is confronted with a collection of engaging drawings and paintings on blueprint paper, cardboard and canvases that all follow their own internal, if challenging, logic. These are works that smoothly unravel, steadily forcing the viewer to navigate their own mental path through those complex layers of translucent and opaque surfaces impregnated with raw colors, built of strokes, and filled with determined lines.*

Ermias Mazengia and Eyob Kitaba are both producing works of seminal importance to Ethiopia's contemporary art scene. The mere fragments put forward for "From Scratches" are reflections on their present circumstances - and thus ours.

Leo LEFORT, *Concierge.*

*\*All H\*TEL DYSTOPIA shows are numbered according to their Google Earth coordinates.*

*This exhibition is an homage to the artist Yohannes Gedamu. Despite his untimely death earlier this year, Yohannes produced one of the most awe-inspiring oeuvres of any painter from the Ethiopian contemporary art scene and deeply influenced many young artists. Ermias and Eyob are two of them.*

**+ Open discussion with Léo Lefort curator of the project "H\*TEL DYSTOPIA" at the Goethe-Institut, on Thursday, October 21st, 2010, 6pm. Moderated by cultural activist Geta Mekonnen.**



**View of the exhibition,  
Works by Ermias Mazengia**  
*Goethe-Institut Addis Abeba, October 2010*





**View of the exhibition,  
Works by Eyob Kitaba**  
*Goethe-Institut Addis Abeba, October 2010*

## Ermias Mazengia

While there are no given narratives in the painted surfaces of Ermias Mazengia, there is instead a genuine meditation on the pace of existence that invites an intense and profound contemplation.

By being clearly visible while remaining out of sight, he thereby places the relationship between his work and spectator under the greatest possible amount of pressure. Ermias relentlessly attempts to transcend the physical, while studying the impact of action and objects. Ermias Mazengia has a specific vision and in his recent works he is still interested in experimentation and re-inventing his work, accumulating shots of colours, and vivid brushstrokes, living us with lacerated scars of chroma.

Layering is key in Ermias' work, whether layers of paint, of thoughts or emotions. Giving birth to this feeling of erosion, recalling decaying architecture, it brought back to my memory a striking show Ermias organised at Tewanney Studio in 2003 entitled Tikil Dingaay – 'Standing Stone'. Then, Ermias presented twenty-one multi-layered colourful paintings, articulated as an informal tribute to the concept of monuments and based on the observation and historical motions of ruins, outlining with a perfect sense of three-dimensional, sculpted rocks, cave art. Ermias stated: "when I put these ideas into paintings, I also tried to put them with female stone ornaments like shells, golds, diamonds and many more that usually give beauty to women".

Even though this exhibition focuses on small oil paintings on cardboard, Ermias is a monumental painter. Small or big (his recent works are about two meters high), the space of the canvas is both deeply constructed and consciously deconstructed. In anticipating the act of painting he controls each and every stroke of his brush, and starts a discussion with the core elements within the space cornered by the canvas.

This show presents oil on cardboard pieces developed for the March 2010 H\*TEL DYSTOPIA exhibition.





**View of the exhibition,  
Works by Ermias Mazengia**  
*Goethe-Institut Addis Abeba, October 2010*

## Eyob Kitaba

Eyob Kitaba's work is as philosophically and visually dense as it is intentionally deceptive. Still expanding his artistic language, Eyob Kitaba remains an enigma; a soft-spoken young artist who rarely talks about his work he is consciously subverting traditional distinctions between painting and drawing, brush and pencil-work, thus making a highly individual contribution to the history of Ethiopian contemporary art.

Eyob's work defies categorization, balancing both personal and collective references while infusing private vision with a sense of poetry. While to some his work might resemble doodles, illegible scratches or scrawls, his forceful staccatos, using felt-tips and markers, ink and acrylic paint and the sharp points of Bic pens, to scar, maul and ravage the blue surface with his unique loopy rhythmic freehand style of calligraphy, are only accumulations, adaptations, mutations and mutilations until they become Image. The paper then remains as a proof, more or less filled with paint and crayon giving a sense of nightmares, claustrophobia and confusion despite their mainly bright and hot colours.

In conversation at his studio, Eyob draws attention towards two oddly diverse but equally significant influences on his ethereal series on blueprint paper: God and Madness. These may seem like strange reference points, but anyone who has become familiar with Eyob's work over the past few years has come to expect the unexpected as his imagination knows few bounds.

This exhibition of works on blueprint paper is drawn from the artist's personal collection.



**View of the exhibition,  
Works by Eyob Kitaba**  
*Goethe-Institut Addis Abeba, October 2010*





Founder & director of ATELIER art gallery, Leo Lefort has an extensive curatorial background in Ethiopia having worked for reputable galleries, public and private institutions, non-governmental organizations, and government from 1999 up to the future.

In 2000 he was a recipient of the prestigious “AFAA Prize”, awarded annually by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs to five cultural entrepreneurs living abroad, for the creation of the Taitu International Art Center. He taught Art Theory & Aesthetics at the School of Fine Arts & Design, Addis Ababa University for three years and was then affiliated for another two years with the Institute of Ethiopian Studies as an independent researcher documenting the development of Ethiopian contemporary arts. In 2006, he co-founded the LeLa Art Gallery where he curated 13 acclaimed solo and group shows featuring local and international artists. He was recently appointed Head of the Visual Art Department at ICS where he has been teaching visual arts courses for the past three years.

Mentored by art historian, theorist & curator Denys Zacharopoulos, Leo Lefort holds a Master Degree in Fine Arts from the Université de Haute Bretagne, Rennes, France.

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**ATELIER** fine art gallery

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