

# Ethiopian Artists Take to Global Art Scene

When Frenchman Leo Lefort first heard he was being assigned to be a curator in Ethiopia, he was horrified at the very thought. Despite his reservations about the place, he went on to Addis Ababa, capital city of Ethiopia — and was relieved to find it a “very beautiful city” and “everything but what people know of it.” In Dubai for the Bastakiya Art Fair 2010, Lefort is one of the curators participating for the first time this year. He will be showcasing the works of 14 Ethiopian artists, whose themes vary from refugees to land disputes — even falling angels. The projects he works on are interesting and powerful in their own right. Currently, he is working on one called Hotel Distopia, Room #25/55. Those, he says, are the coordinates you can find him on, if you were to enter them in Google Earth. “I’m trying to do the same project in other places too, such as New York and France.”

There are 1 clipping(s) in 2 part(s) with summary available in: English

Published on: 14/03/2010    Name: Khaleej Times  
Section: Main section    Country: United Arab Emirates  
Edition: 333    Language: English  
Page: 1, 7    Circulation: 75,135  
Size: 5 cc, 184 cc  
Ad Value: \$6,997.71



*"I realised that it was in Ethiopia that I wasn't restricted to a box. This is the capacity of third world countries."*  
— FRENCHMAN LEO LEFORT, CURATOR



William Gerges from Lebanon measures a piece of cloth to be used at the exhibition of his paintings at the Bastakiya on Saturday. — KT photos by Enrique Soriano



An art work on display at the Bastakiya on Saturday. The Bastakiya Art Fair is to begin on March 15, for which 13 traditional houses will showcase art and culture from various regions

## Ethiopian Artists Take to Global Art Scene

Karen Ann Monsy

DUBAI —When Frenchman Leo Lefort first heard he was being assigned to be a curator in Ethiopia, he was horrified at the very thought. Despite his reservations about the place, he went on to Addis Ababa, capital city of Ethiopia — and was relieved to find it a “very beautiful city” and “everything but what people know of it.”

It's been roughly 11 years since he made the move, and Lefort indicates he has no regrets. On the contrary, he is overwhelmed by the strong artworks that the country is now producing.

In Dubai for the Bastakiya Art Fair 2010, Lefort is one of the curators participating for the first time this year.

He will be showcasing the works of 14 Ethiopian artists, whose themes vary from refugees to land disputes — even falling angels. The projects he works on are interesting and powerful in their own right. Currently, he is working on one called Hotel Distopia, Room #25/55. Those, he says, are the coordinates you can find him on, if you were to enter them in Google Earth. “I'm trying to do the same project in other places too, such as New York and France.”

Speaking of the development of the arts in Ethiopia, he says the art market there is only “just emerging.” It's a description heard most often in connection with Dubai's own foray and expansion into the international arts and culture scene. But Lefort maintains that the two markets still differ greatly. “It's much easier to hold an exhibition in

Dubai,” he says. “You have the infrastructure needed to make exhibitions happen, from international artists to gallery spaces.”

Moreover, he was impressed by the way organisers of the Bastakiya Art Fair took care of everything, making sure he got what he needed seamlessly. On the other hand, he says, in Ethiopia, it would have taken three weeks to get things in — and even then, they wouldn't meet requirements.

“Two years ago, I was working on a documentary on Ethiopian fine art — but I couldn't find a producer. I suppose if you say ‘Ethiopia' and the ‘Red Cross', they'd go together, but ‘Ethiopia' and ‘producer' don't seem to match,” he reflects, with a laugh. Nonetheless, he cautions they are not to be taken lightly. In the school of fine arts in Addis Ababa, where Lefort is teaching art history and aesthetics, 2,000 students compete every year for the 25 seats available. “Despite the obvious limitations, everyone here takes their work seriously.”

As a Frenchman in Ethiopia, has he ever considered moving his work back home? Lefort falls silent for a moment before answering, “I went back to France at one point and began looking for a job. But I realised that it was in Ethiopia that I wasn't restricted to a box. This is the capacity of third world countries,” he says. “When you have to survive, you'll do anything and everything. People used to ask me, ‘Why Ethiopia?' But for me, it's not identity that matters, or place — but it's what you do that counts.”

karen@khaleejtimes.com



Curator Leo Lefort from Addis Ababa, mounts an art work at Bastakiya on Saturday.

Circulation and ad data supplied by:

MediaSource

MEDIAWATCH Middle East