

AÏDA MULUNEH **ON THE EDGE OF PAST FUTURE**

Exhibition period: **February 01 – April 14, 2024**

Opening: **Wednesday, January 31, 2024, 7 pm**

Press Tour: **Wednesday, January 31, 11 am**

Venue: **Fotografie Forum Frankfurt, Braubachstr. 30–32, 60311 Frankfurt**

*Frankfurt am Main, January 31, 2024 – With vibrant colours and an extraordinary visual language, the artist Aïda Muluneh advocates awareness for currently urgent issues such as the unequal distribution of access to water, food and education, the abuse of power and the empowerment of women. Under the title **AÏDA MULUNEH. ON THE EDGE OF PAST FUTURE**, the **Fotografie Forum Frankfurt** is showing seven series of works by the Ethiopian photo artist from the past ten years.*

Aïda Muluneh expresses her critical concerns with artistic vitality, surreal nuances and thought-provoking soul-searching. Her pictures are visual narratives; they have a cinematic character in that she constructs sceneries on location in real landscapes or unique interiors. The models in Muluneh's settings are global and at the same time African ensembles – people with multiple identities and cultural origins. Enchanting figures might appear in business suits or traditional costumery, messengers are equipped with a shepherd's staff or a telephone. Protagonists with colourfully painted faces climb ladders to the sky, emblematic hands throughout her works protect or incite. Muluneh symbolically uses primary colours, postures, and props in her photographic stagings. Red wings become the symbol of womanhood; in the series *Water Life* (2018), it is womanhood provide humanity with water; in *The Road of Glory* (2020), women confront with scenarios of hunger as a weapon of war.

Aïda Muluneh (*1974 in Addis Ababa/Ethiopia) is considered an advocate and leading voice of the African photography community and its global representation. After her family fled the civil war in Ethiopia, Muluneh grew up in Yemen, England and Canada. In 2000 she received her degree in communications with a major in film from Howard University, Washington, D.C. Assignments as a photojournalist followed, including for the Washington Post. Muluneh is the founder and director of Addis Foto Fest, East Africa's first international photo festival, as well as Africa Foto Fair (AFF) in Ivory Coast, where she also lives. Her series *The Road of Glory* was created as an exhibition for the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize.

AÏDA MULUNEH. ON THE EDGE OF PAST FUTURE is the artist's most comprehensive solo show in Europe to date. It was curated by Celina Lunsford, artistic director, and Andrea Horvay, co-curator of the FFF. The exhibition opens the 40th anniversary year of the FFF at the Fotografie Forum Frankfurt.

A **MAGAZINE** with an essay by Celina Lunsford and numerous images of Aïda Muluneh's work is available at the FFF, to accompany the exhibition.

PRESS RELEASE



AÏDA MULNEH ON THE EDGE OF PAST FUTURE

SPECIAL PROGRAMME

THU, 01.02., 5 pm GALLERY TALK
with **AÏDA MULNEH** and **CELINA LUNSFORD**

FRI, 02.02., 6 pm LECTURE
THE ART OF ADVOCACY with **AÏDA MULNEH**

TUE, 20.02., 12.03., 09.04., 3 pm CURATOR TOURS
with **CELINA LUNSFORD** or **ANDREA HORVAY**

PUBLIC GUIDED TOURS every **Wednesday, 5 pm**

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FFF ACADEMY

SAT/SUN, 03./04.02., 10 am–5 pm WORKSHOP
DEVELOPING A VISUAL NARRATIVE with **AÏDA MULNEH**

SAT, 24.02./25.05./31.08./30.11.2024, 10 am–5pm FFF MASTERCLASS
FROM TIME TO PLACE / VON ZEIT ZU ORT with **ANDREA DIEFENBACH**

Further Events at www.fff Frankfurt.org

OPENING HOURS Tue–Sun 11 am –6 pm, Mon closed

ADMISSION regular 7 Euro, reduced 4 Euro

FOTOGRAFIE FORUM FRANKFURT

The Fotografie Forum Frankfurt (FFF) is one of the leading centres of photography in Europe. As an exhibition space, institution and event forum the FFF deals with all aspects of photography. Since its founding in 1984 it has presented at about 270 exhibitions with historic and contemporary artists. Additionally, the programme of the FFF ACADEMY comprises of regular workshops, talks and discussions with internationally renowned photographers, artists and experts. Further information available at www.fff Frankfurt.org

Fotografie Forum Frankfurt is supported by Förderkreis Fotografie Forum Frankfurt e.V., Stadt Frankfurt am Main, FUJIFILM Electronic Imaging Europe and Hauck, Aufhäuser, Lampe



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AÏDA MULUNEH

ON THE EDGE OF PAST FUTURE

Aïda Muluneh about her works

The World is 9

When I returned to Addis Ababa the first nine years became a lesson; a lesson in humility, and a lesson in what it means to return to a land that was foreign to me. Over those nine years, an expression of my grandmother stuck in my mind – she would say, “The world is 9, it is never complete and it’s never perfect.” I thought it was interesting, but it wasn’t until much later as an adult that her voice echoed in my thoughts of whether we can live in this world with full contentment.

We are idealists seeking perfection but living in a reality which does not afford us that balance. Life is unpredictable and imperfect – we must conquer these challenges with strength and endurance because the world within us and the world knocking on our door, bears the unknown future. Regardless, through these experiences, I was inspired to create several new pieces of work. Each image is an exploration of questions about life, love, and history. I am not seeking answers but asking provocative questions about the life that we live – as people, as nations, as beings. I have chosen to continue working on body painting, which is inspired by traditional body art from across Africa. Each work is a reflection of conscious and subconscious manifestations of time and space.

The Distant Gaze

Birthered after exploring a friend’s private collection The Distant Gaze is a series of works initially inspired by images of Ethiopian and Eritrean women documented at the turn of the century by foreign photographers. It was quite evident that many of these images were designed to fulfill the fantasy of the foreign gaze as it relates to the black female body; the same women could be depicted in varying levels of nudity as a still form of striptease. Many of these images became postcards for sale in the European market. Through these images, I found it impossible not to question the implications of the returned gaze of each sitter.

The question of how these women’s bodies were objectified and commodified started an exploration in my work of how to re-vision or re-visit these images. Hence the collection is a reflection and a conversation on how women are portrayed and also the various contemporary issues that still prevail as it relates to women in Africa and also beyond our borders.

AÏDA MULUNEH ON THE EDGE OF PAST FUTURE

The Memory of Hope

Like the longing for a lover's kiss, we used to embrace hope with excitement and fervor for what was right and what was wrong in this world. Now we stand at the shores of the future, seeing in the distance the memory of hope. In our liberal expectations, we seek the validation of righteous paths, yet the reality that confronts us reflects the darkness of our humanity. We are the witnesses who stand at the side of the road, shackled by comfort and conformity. We are the consumers of the pain of others, and we are the supporters of a distorted future. We are the blind eye that has turned towards a manifestation of our own fears; the fear of not going against the grain but of only tending to our own crops.

As the misfortunes of others flicker across our screens, we forget that the suffering of others will eventually find its way to us. This collection is of the future now and of those who bear our burdens, who stood to confront the empire of ignorance and greed.

Passivity is not an option. The violence rooted in those that profit from the toils of the disadvantaged is a manifestation of how we contribute to maintaining our differences based on an idealism of superiority and ego. As catalysts for change we must question 'hope' when calling to action for a better world. The manifestation of this collection is to voice what we refuse to hear and to show what we refuse to see.

Memories In Development

This series was inspired by the Cuban film Memories in Underdevelopment written and directed by Tomas Guterrez. The 1968 film is based on a story of a writer who chose to remain behind in Havana as his wife and friends fled to Miami.

The story line explores the complex narrative through the lead character on the impacts of the social changes that took place in Cuba through the revolution. Having seen this film while in film school, it was something that stayed with me for a long time. Eventually I decided to build a collection based on the relationship between political structures and the developing societies in Africa. In a sense, for many of us in Africa, we are often the victims of poor leadership that has played a major role in our self-determination for a better life. Hence, the collection is an exploration on the impacts of politics in not only the larger scope of our societies but how it also has a major influence in our personal lives.

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The Road of Glory

Since the beginning of time, the human race has been at the mercy of sorrow, even if our existence on this planet was a gift in nature of thought and creativity, our advancements have been marked by systematic destruction and suffering. Through this progression, we must question if our strive for advancement has also made us lose our compassion for one another.

Having spent most of my life between different parts of the world, it has offered me an education on understanding that our suffering is a pattern we create and also resolve. In this collection I wanted to make each piece first a visual provocation, in which it is a balance between the familiar and the unfamiliar: to catch the glance of the viewer through the intense passion of color. However, each frame is a story, a story deeply embedded with moments, emotions, pain, loneliness, rage and the deep sadness that becomes the plight of those caught between the crossfires of political agendas.

I choose to focus on different countries in various moments of history. Through each piece, my main objective was to focus on a representation that is not a surgical documentation of suffering and death, but rather an artistic expression that provokes the curiosity of the onlooker into exploring further the topics presented and to go beyond personal comfort.

My overall statement is to address the predicament of the everyday person, who endures tragic and violent forefronts of decisions implemented behind closed doors. Hence, as we witness from a distance the demise of the people in places such as Yemen through hunger, I can't help but think of the tears shed by mothers who have to witness the death of their children and the rage that must ensue in the youth who helplessly watch not only the death of those around them but also the death of a life and their future. Why is it that with all the technological advancements, we have not managed to alleviate suffering. But rather as time progresses forward, our faith wavers in the storm of strife and we become impartial to the human condition of those less fortunate and we engulf ourselves in denial that what separates us through time and space is actually a reflection of our collective consciousness.

Commissioned by Nobel Peace Center, Oslo, Norway

Wings that Soar

Writing and poetry have always been important inspiration for me. The Poem 'Hope' is the Thing with Feathers by American poet Emily Dickinson (1830–1886) guided me to make this series, dedicated to not giving up hope, as hard as it can be.

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Water Life

This work was inspired by the poem Woman Work by Maya Angelou. My main goal is to address the plight of water access and its impact not only on a society but also on women in rural regions. For those of us who live in cities, we take for granted the privilege that we have in relation to water access, while the realities of those living beyond the city grid encounter challenges that not only impacts their health but also their capabilities to contribute to the development of their communities. With this in mind, each piece is a reflection of the impacts of water access as it relates to women's liberation, health, sanitation and education.

Having worked in several regions in Ethiopia, I have encountered women traveling on foot and carrying the heavy burden of transporting water. Women spend a great deal of time fetching water for the household, which has an adverse effect on the progress of women in our society. The urgency of supporting the access to water in rural regions in Africa tackles various social issues and also is a determining factor in the self-sustainability of a community. Some of these pieces were made in Dallol, Afar, Ethiopia to place emphasis on the message I am transmitting that advocates through art. The world is continually bombarded with the social plight of Africa therefore my focus in this project was to address these topics without the cliché that we see in mainstream media.

Commissioned by WaterAid and supported by H&M Foundation

AÏDA MULUNEH

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*Born in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 1974, **Aïda Muluneh** received her degree in Communications from Howard University in Washington D. C. with a major in Film. Her photography is published widely and is in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art, Hood Museum of Art, the RISD Museum of Art, and the Museum of Biblical Art. Her awards include the European Union Prize at Rencontres Africaines de la Photographie in Bamako, Mali (2007), CRAF International Award of Photography in Spilimbergo, Italy (2010) and the Catch Light Global Fellowship in San Francisco, USA (2018). Aïda Muluneh was the first black woman to co-curate the Nobel Peace Prize exhibition in 2019 and in the following year, she became a commissioned artist for the prize.*

As a jury member for competitions like the Sony World Photography Awards and the World Press Photo Contest her international expertise is valued. She has spoken widely on photography, including at the African Union Cultural Summit, Art Basel, Tedx/Johannesburg. She gave the renowned Sem Presser Lecture at the World Press Photo Festival in Amsterdam in 2019.

Muluneh founded the Addis Foto Fest, the first international photography festival in East Africa and the Africa Foto Fair, Côte d'Ivoire. The latter includes the Africa Foto Fair virtual publication that brings emerging and established talents to the global photography community. The Africa Print House established in her studio in Abidjan, is a creative space that offers end-to-end solutions for photographers in Africa. As a Canon Ambassador, educator and cultural entrepreneur Aïda Muluneh continues to develop projects with local and international institutions in Ethiopia and Côte d'Ivoire. The artist lives in Côte d'Ivoire.

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Compromise, 2017

From the series **The Memory Of Hope**

© Aïda Muluneh, 2024



The American Dream, 2017

From the series **The Memory Of Hope**

© Aïda Muluneh, 2024



In Which We Remain (Namibia), 2020

From the series **The Road of Glory**

© Aïda Muluneh, 2024



The Rain of Fire (Vietnam), 2020

From the series **The Road of Glory**

Commissioned by Nobel Peace Center

© Aïda Muluneh, 2024



The Shackles of Limitations, 2018

From the series **Water Life**

Commissioned by WaterAid and supported by the H&M Foundation

© Aïda Muluneh, 2024



Star Shine, Moon Glow, 2018

From the series **Water Life**

Commissioned by WaterAid and supported by the H&M Foundation

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Ye Buda Eyne, 2017

From the series **Memories In Development**

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Helima, 2017

From the series **The Distant Gaze**

© Aïda Muluneh, 2024



Strength in Honor, 2016

From the series **The World is 9**

© Aïda Muluneh, 2024



Dreams and Delusions – Part Two, 2016

From the series **The World is 9**

© Aïda Muluneh, 2024



Sai Mado/ The Distant Gaze, 2016

From the series **The World is 9**

© Aïda Muluneh, 2024



You Never Knew, 2019

From the series **Wings that Soar**

© Aïda Muluneh, 2024



Black Jesus, 2019

From the series **Wings that Soar**

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