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The Stranger's Notebook – Dawit L. Petros' Journey Across Africa

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All images from the series *The Stranger's Notebook* © Dawit L. Petros, courtesy Tiwani Contemporary

The Stranger's Notebook (Prologue), a solo exhibition of new work by Eritrean artist Dawit L. Petros, his first solo exhibition in Europe, is about to launch at Tiwani Contemporary in London.

Dawit L. Petros was born in Eritrea, East Africa. He is now based in New York City. As such, his work, the gallery says, “explores the relationship between African histories and European ideas of modernism.”

The project’s title, *The Stranger’s Notebook*, encompassing a sprawling journey across Africa, makes reference to the French philosopher Albert Camus’ novel *L’Etranger* (1942), of how Camus understand and communicated “the experience of outsidership”.

Petros also uses as influence the German sociologist Georg Simmel’s ideas of the ‘paradoxical stranger’.



“If wandering is the liberation from every given point in space, and thus the conceptional opposite to fixation at such a point, the sociological form of the “stranger” presents the unity, as it were, of these two characteristics,” Simmel wrote in his seminal essay.

But it was Fesseha Giyorgis, an Abyssinian cultural figure widely regarded as the father of Tigrinya literature, but barely known in Western literary circles, who formed the basis of Petros’ artistic and photographic practice.

Giyorgis wrote travelogues at the turn of the 20th century. Petros identifies About the Author’s Journey from Ethiopia to Italy and the Impressions Made on Him by His Stay in That Country in Tigrinya (1895), in which Giyorgis chronicles his travels from Massawa, on the Red Sea coast, to Italy, where he lived and worked for five years.

“Giyorgis text provides a counterpoint to contemporary narratives of migration and challenges the legacy of European colonialism against which these narratives continue to unfold,” the gallery says of his work.



In *The Stranger's Notebook (Prologue)*, Petros tried to synthesis these texts in order to consider the complexity of migratory movements within Africa, questioning “the privileging of certain narratives of migration over others.”

In that sense, Petros' works selected for this exhibition attempt to challenge “the lack of a critical framework with which to conceptualise accounts of cross-border flows within the African continent.”

Petros' multidisciplinary project – encompassing photography, moving image, objects and sound – draws from work made by the artist during his own, year-long journey from Nigeria to Morocco to Europe between 2014 and 2015. As such, the series includes works made in cities like Bamako in Mali, Nouakchott in Mauritania and Dakar in Senegal.



Petros' images oscillate between figuration and abstraction, combining "the descriptive character of photography with theatrical possibilities of performative still life."

Petros' recent exhibitions include the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York in 2014, a solo exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston in 2014, a solo exhibition at the Durban Art Gallery, South Africa in 2011 and the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. in 2013. In 2012, Petros was awarded an Independent Study Fellowship at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

The Stranger's Notebook follows on from the group photography exhibition The View From Here at Tiwani Contemporary in May 2015. The exhibition is the first of a trilogy of works from Tiwani, which aim to "investigate migration as a key constituent of modernity."

More information can be found [here](#).