

## The Stranger's Notebook (Prologue)

Photographs by

**Dawit Petros**



Untitled, (Prologue). © Dawit Petros. Courtesy of the artist and Tiwani Contemporary.



Dawit L. Petros was born in Eritrea but is currently based in New York City, though he has lived all over the world—Saskatchewan, Montreal and Boston, to name a few locales. Thanks to his diverse and international life experiences, Petros' practice centers on a critical reconsideration of the relationship between African histories and European modernism.

In his latest work, "The Stranger's Notebook (Prologue)," the itinerant and multi-disciplinary artist sketches out the beginnings of an epic journey across the African continent. The work—which embraces photography, moving images, objects and sound—was produced during a year-long trip that covered territory from Nigeria to Morocco and into Europe.

The project's title, originally written as "Le Carnet de l'Étranger," makes reference to the novel *L'Étranger* written by French writer **Albert Camus** in 1942. Petros' work engages with a 21st century conception of "the experience of outsidersness," a theme that Camus addresses in his book. Petros also alludes to the work of the German thinker **Georg Simmel**, a sociologist and philosopher who looked at the concept of a "paradoxical stranger"—a potential vagrant who is simultaneously close to and distant from his surroundings.

Petros also found inspiration in a travel story written at the end of the 19th century by Fesseha Giyorgis, a cultural figure widely regarded as the father of Tigrinya literature [**Tigrinya** is the most widely spoken tongue in Petros' homeland, Eritrea]. Giyorgis' story recounts his journey from the coast of Africa to Italy. The text—at once immediate and antiquated—provides an important counterpoint to our contemporary images of migration.

Petros, meanwhile, focuses his gaze on the complexity of migration *within* Africa. The pictorial elements oscillate between figurative and abstract, mixing the documentary nature of photography with the medium's more theatrical, performative side. The artist draws on both aesthetics and politics in order to consider the relationship between the self and place—something that is ever more tenuous and important amidst the upheavals of the 21st century.

—Jeanne Mercier

*Jeanne Mercier is a critic and photo editor based in Europe and Africa. She is the co-founder and editor of the platform **Afrique in visu**.*

*Editors' Note: The work of Dawit L. Petros will be shown at the **1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair** running from October 6 to 9 in London.*