

THEO ESHETU
ATLAS PORTRAITS

31 January – 29 February 2020

Tiwani Contemporary is delighted to present Theo Eshetu's third solo exhibition at the gallery.

"These portraits are a reflection on the history of cultural identities through the projection of images of busts, statues, masks and works of art onto real people's faces. It was inspired by a banner that formerly decorated the Ethnographic Museum in Berlin showing an image of 5 masks representing the five continents, which became the screen onto which the video was projected in Documenta 14. The idea was to question the centrality of European cultural models and the validity of divisions based on continents. No longer, I think, can we equate physiognomy with geography because through increased mobility of people, and objects, the world has become more intertwined.

Cultural identities have never been fixed and defined but have been created and moulded through political projections, erected and destroyed by historical events and have fluctuated with the displacement of cultural objects and the migration of populations... all these seem to point to the impossibility of fixing identities in time, as their nature is to be in constant flux. We can only define the now, and the now is grotesque, uncertain, and burdened by the ghosts of the past. There is however also beauty in the present, a vitality for new justices, a search for new harmonies and contrary to facile political tendencies, an acceptance and desire for hybrid states hitherto unknown."

Theo Eshetu

About the artist

Theo Eshetu has worked in media art since 1982, creating installations, video art works, and television documentaries. As a videomaker, he explores the expressive capabilities of the medium and the manipulation of the language of television. Exploring themes and imagery from anthropology, art history, scientific research, and religious iconography, his work redefines how electronic media shapes identity and perception. World cultures, particularly the relationship of African and European cultures, often inform Eshetu's work.

He was born in 1958 in London and grew up in Addis Ababa, Dakar and London before establishing himself in Rome. He currently lives and works in Berlin. His works have been shown at major video art festivals, receiving awards in Berlin, Milan and Locarno. Solo shows include: *Faces and Places*, Akbank Sanat, Istanbul (2019); *Feedback: Art, Africa and the Eighties*, Iwalewahaus, University of Bayreuth, Bayreuth, Germany (2018); *The Slave Ship* at Tiwani Contemporary, London (2017); *Brave New World* at the Museum of African Art, The Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC (2010) and the Baltimore Museum of Art (2006) and the multiscreen video installation *The Return of the Axum Obelisk* at the Unesco Headquarters, Paris (2009), Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels (2010), DAADGalerie, Berlin (2014) and the American Academy in Rome (2015). Eshetu's works have also been presented at Von Verdängtem, *Der Nacht Und Der Farbe Schwarz* (2018, curated by Heidi Brunnschweiler), Documenta 14 (2017), the Deutsche Bank Kunsthalle (2015), Göteborg Biennial (2015), Kochi Biennale (2014), the 54th Venice Biennale (2011), the Sharjah Biennial (2011), The Tropics (2009, curated by Alfons Hug) and Snap Judgements (2006, curated by Okwui Enwezor).

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