Ethiopia at the Crossroads
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Contents

[ENTRY EXPERIENCE]

[TITLE WALL]

Ethiopia at the Crossroads

[INTRODUCTORY PANEL]

Ethiopian art reflects the rich traditions of an independent nation situated at the juncture of three continents, Africa, Asia, and Europe. *Ethiopia at the Crossroads* places the country's significant history and artistic traditions in this global context.

Ethiopia has direct access to the Red Sea, Nile River, Mediterranean Sea, and Indian Ocean. Its location was at the nexus of travel, trade, and routes of pilgrimage. The resulting crosscurrents enriched its local history and artistic production. Ethiopia—the only African nation to avoid colonization—negotiated these interactions independently.

This exhibition examines more than 17 centuries of Ethiopian art, representing the country's notable history and frequent exchanges with surrounding neighbors, as well as distant cultures, including South Arabia, Egypt, the Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire, Armenia, Europe, and India.

The historic and contemporary artworks on view created by artists from Ethiopia and its diasporas, as well as the voices of Ethiopian community members in the greater Washington, DC, area, reveal the enduring significance of the country's cultural legacy.

[CURATOR NAMES]

[image]

[image credit]
Courtesy of the Walters Art Museum

Christine Sciacca
Curator of European Art, 300–1400 CE
The Walters Art Museum

[image]

[image credit]
Photo by Nakeya Brown. Courtesy of Tsedaye Makonnen

Tsedaye Makonnen
Guest curator of contemporary art

[image]

Karen Kramer
The Stuart W. and Elizabeth F. Pratt Curator of Native American and Oceanic Art and Culture
PEM

[image]

Lydia Peabody
Curator-at-Large
PEM

All works were created by an artist in Ethiopia unless otherwise mentioned.

[SUBSECTION: A History of Interactions and Relationships]

[SUBSECTION PANEL]

A History of Interactions and Relationships

Ethiopia's significant yet often overlooked role in world history and culture can be traced across millennia. This section highlights key historic moments of interaction between an independent Ethiopia and neighboring and global cultures. It places artworks in conversation and presents some examples of artistic exchange that resulted from contact between Ethiopians and others. Ethiopia's history of interactions begins with contacts in South Arabia, and the country's story continues with present-day Ethiopia and the Ethiopian diaspora including in North America and Europe.

[EXHIBITION CREDIT PANEL]

Ethiopia at the Crossroads is co-organized by the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore; the Peabody Essex Museum; and the Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio. Christine Sciacca, the Walters Art Museum, curated the exhibition.

The exhibition is made possible by two major grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities: Democracy demands wisdom and by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (MA-253352-Oms.-23).

The exhibition at PEM is made possible by the generosity of Carolyn and Peter S. Lynch and The Lynch Foundation, and The Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation. We also thank James B. and Mary Lou Hawkes, Chip and Susan Robie, and Timothy T. Hilton as supporters of the Exhibition Innovation Fund. We recognize the generosity of PEM's East India Marine Associates.

Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this exhibition do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

[NEH LOGO]
[IMLS LOGO]

[ADVISORY CREDIT PANEL]

The Walters Art Museum's Community Advisory Group helped shape the exhibition and forge connections with the Ethiopian community, including Ethiopian religious and community leaders in America and Ethiopia: Eyerusalem Assefa, Qesis Nehemiah Getu, Qesis Berhanu Gobena, Mygenet Tesfaye Harris, Abdulaziz Z. Kamus, Rachel Titilayo Leslie, Fitsum Shebeshe, Admassu Tassew, Amare Worku, and Tadu Yimam. An additional group of cross-disciplinary professionals contributed on the National Endowment for the Humanities Advisory Committee, including Andrea Myers Achi, Solange Ashby, Heather Badamo, Wendy Laura Belcher, Aaron Michael Butts, Helen C. Evans, Daniel Seife, Michael Feleke, Jan-Lodewijk Grootaers, Getatchew Haile, Verena B. Krebs, Getachew Metaferia, Sana Mirza, and Kristen Windmuller-Luna. Takele Merid, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University, and Yikunnoamlak Mezgebu and Geremew Kebede, National Archives and Library of Ethiopia, also provided substantial project support. We thank them all for their deep engagement and commitment.

Tsedaye Makonnen would like to thank Solyana Hailu for her contributions as curatorial assistant.

PEM also thanks Shawkay Ottmann (Anishinaabe, Fishing Lake First Nation) for her curatorial contributions during the 2023 Native American Fellowship Program.

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.338]

Julie Mehretu
Born 1970, Ethiopia
Works in New York
Conjured Parts (heart), Aleppo, 2016
Ink and acrylic on canvas
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchased 2017, 47544

In this painting, Julie Mehretu responds to media coverage of the 2016 bombings during the Syrian Civil War. The media catapulted the public city square in Aleppo to the world stage as a site of struggle, power, protest, and revolution during the Arab Spring, much like Ethiopia's Meskel Square following the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974.

Scholar Dagmawi Woubshet connects this work to the tumultuous social and political circumstances that shaped Mehretu's young life in Ethiopia. Mehretu interweaves hauntingly blurry lines. Illegible painterly details hover above a base layer of obscured photographs of destroyed apartment buildings. Her use of abstraction, hallmarked by layers of mark-making, explores both a place of no location and a story map of personal experience.

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[AIDA MULUNEH PUTTING IT TOGETHER PHOTO ET.343]
[ET.343]

Aïda Muluneh
Born 1974, Ethiopia
Works in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire
Putting It Together, printed 2023
From the series *The World is 9*, 2016
Inkjet print
PEM, museum purchase, by exchange, 2023.33.2

This piece was created before the Oromo incidents that have taken a toll in our nation, as it relates to the civil unrest of the Oromo people in the South. The cape that she wears is a traditional outfit called 'Daba' that men wear during various celebrations. Most of my work, which also includes the use of face paint, is often utilizing the base traditional elements of our culture and expressing different things in the current contemporary society that I have experienced. When I use specific clothing or colors, it is in a sense connecting my country's rich heritage into the images. Most Ethiopians when they see these images will recognize some of these elements and in a way it is to show our diversity and for me it's also a way to incorporate our culture into the contemporary.

—Aïda Muluneh, artist

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.245]

Nativity, *Presentation of Christ in the Temple*, and *Adoration of the Magi*, 18th century
Glue tempera on overlapping canvas pieces
The Walters Art Museum, museum purchase with funds provided by Elizabeth Worthington Philip Bonner in honor of Nicholas Worthington Philip, 2021, 36.18

Wall paintings were one of the earliest forms of painting in Ethiopia, along with illuminated manuscripts, beginning in the 11th and 12th centuries. The tradition of church decoration continues to this day. This mural was likely painted on canvas and mounted on the outer wall of an Ethiopian Orthodox church sanctuary, known as the mäqdäs, which is typically covered floor to ceiling with narrative and iconic scenes. Notice how this painting displays three different scenes from the childhood of Jesus Christ.

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.252, ET.251, ET.140]

Processional cross, 15th century
Processional cross, late 18th century

Copper alloy
The Walters Art Museum, museum purchase with funds provided by the W. Alton Jones Foundation Acquisition Fund, 1996, 54.2894 and 54.2893

Processional cross, probably 18th–20th century
Cast brass alloy
Dallas Museum of Art, gift of Dr. Hebe Redden and Dr. Kenneth Redden, 1991.352.41

Some of the most striking rituals in present-day Christian practices in Ethiopia involve crosses like these. In church, practitioners carry the metal objects before them, lit by flickering candles and lamps. They also lift them up during open-air processions, silhouetting the intricate metalwork against the sky. Priests also carry cloth-draped crosses on poles at the conclusion of church services. Numerous processional crosses feature in elaborate parades through the streets on holy days.

The cross, a symbol of Christ's victory over death, appears in myriad shapes in Ethiopia, some of which are particular to a specific region of Ethiopia or time period. Some earlier crosses feature intersecting lines that create a pattern filled with numerous small crosses. Later crosses have flared arms and portraits of donor figures or scenes from Christ's life incised on their surface.

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.199]

Censer, 18th–20th century
Iron
PEM, gift of Charles R. and Elizabeth C. Langmuir, 1979, E67939

Metalwork objects like this incense burner continue to play a central role in the performance of Ethiopian Orthodox ceremonies and rituals by engaging the senses of those taking part. Censers (maʿəṭänt), often made of metal, are filled with fragrant incense and swung to perfume the air of the church.

[SUBSECTION: Provenance]

[SUBSECTION PANEL]

Provenance

Many factors contribute to an object's provenance, or history of ownership. Foreigners began collecting Ethiopian art on a significant scale in the 19th century. Often records no longer exist to show precisely how and when collectors acquired these objects. Although Ethiopia was never colonized, attempts by other countries to overtake it sometimes resulted in their removal of objects representing the country's cultural heritage.

We, the exhibition organizers, research an object's provenance to reconstruct, update, and share the history based on available information. The ownership history of each Ethiopian work proposed for inclusion in this exhibition was examined, and any objects known to have left Ethiopia as the result of pillaging are not included here. However, for many of the works exhibited, little information about their past is known, and further research remains to be done. Whenever possible, we strive to share the precise location where each object was made or found, in addition to the names of collectors or dealers whose hands the artwork passed through prior to its acquisition.

For additional information about the provenance of objects in this exhibition, visit the Online Collection at art.thewalters.org.

[SECTION: Origins, Religions, Languages]

[SECTION PANEL]

Origins, Religions, Languages

The known story of Ethiopia extends back almost five million years to early humans and what many know as the beginning of humanity itself. Appreciating Ethiopia's long and unique history as a center of global interaction, its multiple religions, and its ancient languages is critical to a deeper understanding of the country as well as for the art produced there.

Today, the people of Ethiopia represent about 75 ethnicities. Four of these groups—the Oromo, Amhara, Somali, and Təgray—make up about 75 percent of the country's population. The majority of Ethiopians practice one of the three major Abrahamic faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—religions associated with the prophet Abraham (or Ibrahim). Each of these religious traditions holds a long history in Ethiopia, and Ethiopia played a central role in the development and spread of these faiths and the artistic practices associated with them.

Gəʿəz, the classical Ethiopic language, appears in historic and church manuscripts and on painted icons. It is the foundation for the alphabet used by many languages spoken in Ethiopia and Eritrea today.

This section highlights Ethiopian figurative works and sculptural production prior to the nation's adoption of Christianity in the 4th century.

[SUBSECTION: Ethiopia's Southwest]

[SUBSECTION PANEL]

Ethiopia's Southwest

In Ethiopia's diverse southwest, communities often follow local religions and produce different types of objects than those made elsewhere in Ethiopia. The tradition of three-dimensional sculpture, such as memorial figures produced by the Konso peoples, has flourished in the region, providing a link between sculptural production in Ethiopia and that of other regions in sub-Saharan Africa. Many cultures in the south, including the Gurage, Sidama, and Suri, produce wearable or functional artworks used for personal care and adornment, including headrests, clothing, beadwork jewelry, and accessories.

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.005, ET.004]

Konso artists in Ethiopia

Waakaa or waga, 19th century
Wood and metal

Waakaa or waga, 19th century or earlier
Wood

Brooklyn Museum, gift of Serge and Jodie Becker-Patterson, 2000.94.4 and 1998.124.1

The Konso peoples of southern Ethiopia have long embraced the tradition of three-dimensional sculpture. They produce waakaa or waga, or grave markers, like these in the shape of human figures, to mark the tombs of powerful men. The markers appear in male and female form—at right and left here respectively—and the practice of erecting the stelae may date back to the 11th century.

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.157]

Suri (Surma) artist in Ethiopia
Belt, about 1960
Beads and cord
Minneapolis Institute of Art, The Raymond and Ruth Reister Endowment for Art Acquisition and the Mary Ruth Weisel Endowment for Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, 2021.70.9

Traders brought glass beads to Ethiopia beginning in the late 19th century. Beadwork is central to the personal adornment of several groups in Ethiopia's southwest, including the Suri (Surma). Married women of this culture and of some neighboring countries still wear belts like this one. Beaded works such as these are some of the most expensive and elaborate objects produced.

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.154, ET.208, ET.155]



Oromo artist in Ethiopia
Headrest, 19th century
Wood
Minneapolis Institute of Art, The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund, 99.13.2

Sidama artist in Ethiopia
Headrest, 20th century
Wood and fiber
PEM, gift of Charles R. and Elizabeth C. Langmuir, after 1973, E68356

Gurage artist in Ethiopia
Headrest, 20th century
Wood
Minneapolis Institute of Art, The Christina N. and Swan J. Turnblad Memorial Fund, 99.45.1

Artists have produced headrests in the shape of small stands throughout Africa for many centuries. When an individual lies down to rest, a headrest fits under their neck to elevate the head above the ground and to preserve elaborate hairstyles. The varied shapes of these three headrests reflect different styles common among the Oromo, Gurage, and Sidama cultures in Ethiopia.

[SUBSECTION: Judaism in Ethiopia]

[SUBSECTION PANEL]

Judaism in Ethiopia

Prior to the arrival of Christianity, many people in Ethiopia practiced Judaism, perhaps linking back to the meeting of the Ethiopian Queen of Sheba and King Solomon of Israel in the 10th century BCE. The Jewish community in Ethiopia, known as Betä Ǝsraʾel, or Beta Israel, has persisted over centuries. Originally, several Betä Ǝsraʾel people were located in the city of Gondär and in the surrounding region, particularly in the Simien Mountains to the north.

In the 20th century, Jewish community members produced objects in diverse media, most notably silver jewelry displaying Jewish symbols, woven basketry, and small-scale ceramic sculptures depicting animals, abstract human forms, or the history of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Over the past few decades, due to famine and religious persecution, the Israeli and American governments sponsored the relocation of nearly 50,000 Betä Ǝsraʾel Jews to Israel. While thousands of Ethiopians claim Jewish ancestry in Ethiopia today, a small population of Betä Ǝsraʾel remains in Gondär.

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.232]

Yederesal Abuhay
Active in the 20th century, Ethiopia
Pillow sham with two kessim (rabbis) and their students in front of a synagogue, about 1990–2012
Cotton, plain weave cotton, and acrylic embroidery
Collection of Jan Thorman and Michael Halbig

Artists from the Betä Ǝsraʾel community in Ethiopia produced ceramics, such as small figurines and vessels covered with luminous black glaze, dolls dressed in cloth garments, and expressive terracotta heads of men and women.

In the 1990s through 2010s, the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry created a work program for Ethiopian Jews in Addis Abäba. With the support of this program, Jewish Ethiopian artists created basketry and textile objects, like this pillow sham.

[OBJECT LABEL]
[ET.025]

Artist in the Betä Ǝsraʾel community, Ethiopia
Necklace, 20th century
Silver, metal, and string
Minneapolis Institute of Art, The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund, 99.44.1

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL]
[ET.202, ET.203, ET.205, ET.206]

TOP TO BOTTOM

Sculptures of male and female heads, probably 20th century
Terracotta

Female figurine, 20th century
Glazed terracotta

King Solomon and Queen of Sheba figures, 20th century
Glazed terracotta

PEM, gift of Charles R. and Elizabeth C. Langmuir, after 1973, E68895, E68752, and E68736

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL]
[ET.029, ET.204, ET.207]



TOP TO BOTTOM

Artist in the Betä Ǝsraʾel community, Ethiopia
Vase, 20th century
Earthenware
Minneapolis Institute of Art, The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund, 99.82.1

Bird, 20th century
Bull, 20th century
Glazed terracotta
PEM, gift of Charles R. and Elizabeth C. Langmuir, after 1973, E68359 and E68741

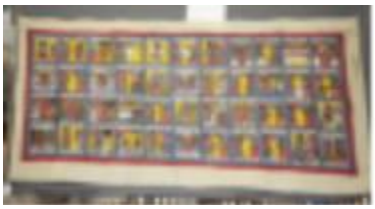
[SUBSECTION: Makədda: The Queen of Sheba]

[SUBSECTION PANEL]

Makədda: The Queen of Sheba

Queen Makədda, Ethiopia's name for the Queen of Sheba, is a significant figure in the history of Ethiopia. First recorded in the Hebrew Bible, Queen Makədda is the primary subject of the Kebrä nägäśt (Glory of the Kings), a 14th-century Ethiopian text written in Gəʿəz. In this epic, ruler Queen Makədda is described as fiercely independent and wise. She travels to the Kingdom of Israel to see the storied monarch King Solomon (about 970–931 BCE). From her union with King Solomon, Queen Makədda gives birth to a son, Mənilək. In adulthood, Mənilək too sojourns to Israel to meet his father. Upon Mənilək's return to Ethiopia after years in Israel, Mənilək's envoy takes the Ark of the Covenant, a sacred relic containing two stone tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments, from Jerusalem to Ethiopia. Today, the Ark of the Covenant is still said to reside in the church of Maryam Ṣəyon in Aksum. The Kebrä nägäśt upholds Mənilək as the first ruler in a Solomonic dynastic line of Ethiopian kings lasting two millennia.

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL]
[ET.194, ET.246]



Queen of Sheba and King Solomon Conceiving King Mənilək I, 20th century
Tempera on canvas
PEM, gift of Charles R. and Elizabeth C. Langmuir, after 1973, E76042

Queen of Sheba and King Solomon Conceiving King Mənilək I, 20th century
Paint on canvas
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Dr. John Money, 1994.7.20

These paintings depict the meeting and union of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon in a series of 44 individual scenes laid out in a grid. They read from top to bottom and from left to right. This story appeared in written form in the 14th century in Ethiopia, but Ethiopian artists only began to depict the story in narrative paintings in the late 19th century to promote Ethiopia's long history and its connections to surrounding cultures. Artists primarily executed these works for foreign diplomats and the tourist market.

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.028, ET.027, ET.026]

Artists in the Betä Ǝsraʾel community, Ethiopia
Baskets, 20th century
Plant fibers
Minneapolis Institute of Art, The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund, 99.44.4, 99.44.2, and 99.44.3

Like Islamic artists in Harär in eastern Ethiopia, the Jewish community in Ethiopia produced basketry with intricate patterns woven from plant fibers, such as these examples with vibrantly colored variations on a star motif.

[SUBSECTION: The Aksumite Kingdom and the Roman Empire]

[SUBSECTION PANEL]

The Aksumite Kingdom and the Roman Empire

The Aksumite kingdom in Ethiopia (270–early 7th century) was one of the great powers of the ancient world, linking the trade networks of the Roman Empire in the Mediterranean and the Indian states to the east (present-day India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan). Aksumite kings built tomb complexes and stone funerary monuments, known as stelae. Some of these tombs still stand in Aksum in northern Ethiopia. Aksumite kings also minted coins with their portraits and religious symbolism, which are often the only records that survive of their names and identities. This currency emerged at the same time coinage with images of Roman emperors circulated in the Mediterranean and North Africa, acting as a model for imperial portraiture. Aksumite coins also drew upon traditions of royal portraits shown in profile that already existed in African painting and sculpture. The Aksumite Empire laid the foundation for the later Ethiopian kingship.

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL]
[EIGHT COINS: ET.271, ET.275, ET.276, ET.274, ET.278, ET.272, ET.277, ET.273]

İzmit artist in Türkiye (Turkey)
Solidus of Constantine I, 336–37
Gold
The Walters Art Museum, museum purchase, 1946, 59.690

İzmit artist in Türkiye (Turkey)
Solidus of Valens, 364–67
Gold
The Walters Art Museum, anonymous gift, 2017, 59.798

Aksum artist in Ethiopia
Coin of Endybis, about 270–310
Silver alloy
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Margaret and Joseph Knopfelmacher, 1998, 59.795.13

Aksum artist in Ethiopia
Coin of Ousanas, early 4th century
Silver alloy with traces of gilding
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Joseph and Margaret Knopfelmacher, 1996, 59.794

Aksum artist in Ethiopia
Coin of MḤDYS, about 450
Copper

The Walters Art Museum, gift of Margaret and Joseph Knopfelmacher, 1998, 59.795.20

Aksum artist in Ethiopia
Coin of an anonymous king, 4th century
Silver alloy with traces of gilding
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Joseph and Margaret Knopfelmacher, 1996, 59.793

Aksum artist in Ethiopia
Coin of an anonymous king, 3rd–7th century
Brass
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Margaret and Joseph Knopfelmacher, 1998, 59.795.16

Probably an Aksum artist in Ethiopia
Coin probably of WZB, undated
Lead
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Margaret and Joseph Knopfelmacher, 1998, 59.795.11

[SECTION: MIGRATION AND CHRISTIAN CONNECTIONS]

Migration and Christian Connections

Fewer than 20 miles from Ethiopia across the Red Sea is the Arabian Peninsula and current-day Yemen. Artworks in this section elaborate upon the connections of the two regions through their history, architecture, art, and language from ancient to modern times.

Due to their relationship with the Holy Roman Empire, Aksumite kings used Greek, but it was the connection between Ethiopia and South Arabia that developed Gəʿəz, a Semitic script and classical Ethiopic language derived from a South Arabian language.

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.265, ET.267, ET.266, ET.269]

LEFT TO RIGHT

Artists in the Arabian Peninsula

Fragment of an ibex frieze, 8th–7th century BCE
Ram's head, 1st century BCE–2nd century
Stela with a seated woman, 2nd–1st century BCE
Stela with convex top, 1st century

Calcite alabaster
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Giraud and Carolyn Foster, 2007, 21.37, 21.58, 21.48, and 21.53

Comparing the art and architecture of South Arabia with Ethiopia and its northeastern African neighbors highlights the exchanges that took place among these cultures of the Red Sea region. The small rectangular stone slab, or stela, here sits upright on a base with an

inscription commemorating a South Arabian woman named Ḥayd ibn ʿAqīl and her family. The upright shape and commemorative purpose of this work are echoed in the later monumental stelae erected by Aksumite kings in Ethiopia.
[SUBSECTION: South Arabian Neighbors]

[SUBSECTION PANEL]

South Arabian Neighbors

There are fewer than 20 miles between Africa and the Arabian Peninsula at the Bāb al-Mandab Strait, the southernmost point of the Red Sea. On its eastern shore is a region known as South Arabia in antiquity and as Yemen today, and on its western shore is historic Ethiopia, now present-day Djibouti and Eritrea. Travel and trade between these two Red Sea regions resulted in the common adoption and adaptation of language, letter forms, and decorative motifs in art.

[OBJECT LABEL]
[ET.268]

Artist at the monastery Gundä Gunde in Ethiopia
Gospel book with Mary and Joseph with the Innocents massacred by King Herod, early to mid-16th century
Ink and paint on parchment
The Walters Art Museum, museum purchase with funds provided by the W. Alton Jones Foundation Acquisition Fund, 1998, W.850, fols. 1v–2r

[OBJECT LABEL]
[ET.270]

Artist in Yemen
Bib collar–type necklace, late 19th–early 20th century
Silver alloy, glass, and nylon
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Dr. Giraud and Carolyn Foster, 2021, 57.2357

[SUBSECTION: Byzantium]

[SUBSECTION PANEL]

Byzantium

Ethiopia was long connected to the Eastern Roman, or Byzantine, Empire (330–1453) centered in Constantinople (present-day Istanbul), through religious exchange and trade networks that extended across the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean. Ethiopia and Byzantium shared a common belief in Eastern Orthodox Christianity, which includes Coptic, Greek, and Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. It is likely that traders, travelers, and Ethiopian diplomats imported Christian liturgical and devotional objects, including painted icons, from their excursions abroad in the Byzantine Empire into the country. Other portable objects like illuminated Christian manuscripts and metalwork helped to circulate artistic motifs, like the cross, and iconography, like the Virgin and Child and biblical scenes, between Ethiopia and Byzantium.

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATIONS]
[ET.114, ET.289, ET.287]



Byzantine artist in Crete
Icon with the Virgin Mary and Christ child, 15th–17th century
Tempera and gold on wood
Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University, IESMus7010

Although Ethiopian artists did not produce icons painted on wood panels until the late 14th century, it is likely that icons from the Byzantine Empire circulated through Ethiopia much earlier. The followers at the Ethiopian monastery of Gundä Gunde documented this icon of the Virgin Mary and Christ child as early as the mid-19th century, and according to oral tradition, it was brought from Jerusalem in the 15th century by ʿƎzra, the monastery's abbot. The Virgin and Christ appear in front of a dark green curtain with a gold pattern, above which is a solid gold ground, a hallmark of Byzantine icons and manuscript illuminations that Ethiopian artists did not embrace.

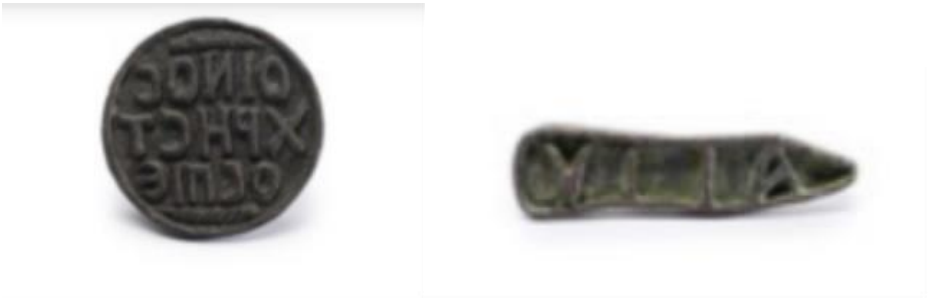
Artist probably in Lasta, Ethiopia
Processional cross, 12th–13th century
Brass

The Walters Art Museum, museum purchase with funds provided by the W. Alton Jones Foundation Acquisition Fund, 1996, 54.2891

Artist in Təgray, Ethiopia
Gospel book with the canon table and the Fountain of Life, early 14th century
Ink and paint on parchment

The Walters Art Museum, museum purchase with funds provided by the W. Alton Jones Foundation Acquisition Fund, 1996, W.836, fols. 5v–6r

This Gospel book is the oldest Ethiopian manuscript in a North American collection.
[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.285, ET.286]



Artist in the Eastern Mediterranean (Byzantine)
Commercial stamp, 6th–8th century
Copper alloy
The Walters Art Museum, museum purchase, 1993, 54.2838

Artist in the Eastern Mediterranean (Byzantine)
Commercial stamp, 6th–8th century
Copper alloy
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Mr. Daniel M. Friedenberg, 1994, 54.2883

Metalwork stamps, which merchants used to mark goods in the marketplace, circulated through trade networks. They likely used these Byzantine examples—one with the word "Health" and another with the phrase "Drink good wine" in Greek—to impress the seals of ceramic wine jars. Archaeologists have found similar stamps in Ethiopia, and the National Museum of Ethiopia preserves some in their collection.

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.185, ET.181, [ET.301]

LEFT TO RIGHT

Leaf from a Gospel book with the Fountain of Life, 14th–15th century
Tempera and ink on parchment
Private collection

Artist in the Eastern Mediterranean (Byzantine)
Leaf from a Gospel book or lectionary with Saint John the Evangelist, 11th century
Ink and tempera on parchment
Private collection

Leaf from a Gospel book with Saint Luke, late 14th century
Ink and paint on parchment
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Knopfelmacher, 1996, W.840v

Central to Christian liturgy, Gospel books transmitted imagery around the wider Byzantine world. One feature common to illuminated copies of the Gospels across cultures are portraits of their authors, the evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Comparing evangelist images from Ethiopia and Byzantium side by side reveals common motifs and details, such as writing tools laid out on a cupboard or shelf next to them. Another shared image is the Fountain of Life, shown here as a multi-columned, circular structure, a tholos or tempietto, surrounded by birds, deer, and vegetation that evoke the lushness of the Garden of Eden and the life-giving qualities of the fountain's water.

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.288, ET.279, ET.127, ET.152, ET.175]

LEFT TO RIGHT

Artist in the Eastern Mediterranean (Byzantine)
Cross with Saint Blaise, 10th–11th century
Copper alloy
The Walters Art Museum, museum purchase, 1993, 54.2840

Processional cross, 15th century
Copper alloy
The Walters Art Museum, museum purchase with funds provided by the W. Alton Jones Foundation Acquisition Fund, 1996, 54.2892

Artist in the Eastern Mediterranean (Byzantine)
Processional cross, probably 10th–12th century
Cast brass alloy
Dallas Museum of Art, gift of Dr. Hebe Redden and Dr. Kenneth Redden, 1991.352.44

Processional cross, about 14th–15th century
Copper alloy
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Virginia, The Reverend Dr. Vienna Cobb Anderson Endowment for Ethiopian and Coptic Art, 2019.40

Processional cross, about 13th century
Bronze
Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University, IESMus4654

As in Ethiopia, metalwork crosses featured in the Orthodox Christian liturgy of the Byzantine Empire. One example above is an equal-armed cross from the 10th–11th century

with rounded ends and the standing figure of Saint Blaise, a 4th-century bishop of Armenia, carved into the surface. Byzantine metalwork crosses also circulated in the Christian world beyond Byzantium, as evidenced by an example at right that was found in Ethiopia. Artists also produced equal-armed, Greek-style crosses in Ethiopia, but with an additional feature of arched lower "arms" at the base of the cross. These lower loops are functional and distinguishing features for Ethiopian crosses; they hold textile strips that "dress" the cross.

[SUBSECTION: Coptic Egypt]

[SUBSECTION PANEL]

Coptic Egypt

According to a legend rooted deeply in Ethiopian history, two devout Syrian brothers from Tyre, in present-day Lebanon, brought Christianity to Ethiopia in the 4th century. These brothers, Frumentius and Aedesius, were shipwrecked on the coast of present-day Eritrea and taken to the court of King ʿEzana (reigned mid-4th century) in Aksum, and eventually converted the king to Christianity. Frumentius later became Ethiopia's first bishop. The Coptic Orthodox Church in Alexandria, Egypt, oversaw the Ethiopian Orthodox Church from its early history until 1959.

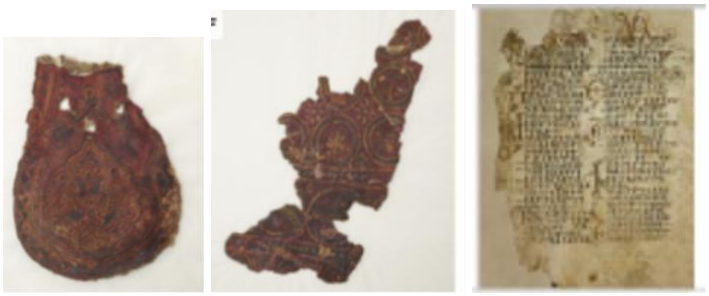
Regular contact between Ethiopia and Egypt through trade and shared religious beliefs fostered the exchange of artistic motifs and techniques in manuscript illumination, textiles, and leatherwork. The Nile River, which runs through Ethiopia and Egypt, also provided Ethiopia access to the Mediterranean Sea, and therefore to the African, European, and western Asian cultures surrounding it.

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.280]

Artist in Egypt
Fragment of the Book of Exodus, 8th century
Ink and paint on parchment
The Walters Art Museum, museum purchase, 1949, W.739, fol.1r

This fragment of the book of Exodus, the second book in the Bible, was once part of a manuscript probably made in a Coptic Christian monastery in the 8th century and written in Coptic, an Egyptian language that uses the Greek alphabet. The Coptic Orthodox Church was the mother Church of Ethiopia from the arrival of Christianity under King ʿEzana of Aksum in the 4th century into the 20th century.

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.282, ET.281, ET.021]



Artist probably in Egypt
Fragment of a pouch, early 14th century
Textile, cord, and stained alum-tawed hide, with gold and silver
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Dr. Richard Ettinghausen, 1958, 73.109

Artist in Egypt
Fragment, 7th–9th century
Paint on stained parchment or alum-tawed hide
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Dr. Richard Ettinghausen, 1952, 73.106

Artist probably from Fayyūm
Leaf from *Life of Apa Samuʾel*, 10th century
Tempera colors and ink
The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. 12 (85.MS.119)

Coptic manuscripts often display detailed decorative patterns that enhance text headings, as in the interlocking designs found in the headpiece of this page from *Life of Apa Samuʾel*.

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.071, ET.070, ET.126]

Artists in Egypt

Fragment of the upper cover of an Ancient Coptic Binding, 9th–10th century
Leather, gold leaf, painted parchment, and papyrus board

Hermeneiai (commentaries) with Hymns, about 897–98
Tempera on parchment

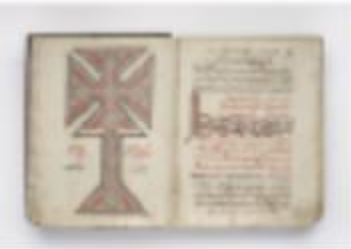
Fragments of an Ancient Coptic Binding, 9th–10th century
Leather, gold leaf, and papyrus board

The Morgan Library & Museum, New York, purchased for J. Pierpont Morgan (1837–1914) in 1911, MS M.569A2, MS M.574, and MS M.584A

[OBJECT LABEL]
[ET.019]

Gospel book with the opening to the Gospel of Mark, about 1504–5
Tempera on parchment
The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. 102 (2008.15), fols. 103v-104

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.222]



Artist in Egypt
Coptic-Arabic book of prayer, 18th century
Tempera and ink on parchment
The Melikian Collection

The Coptic Orthodox Church was the parent Church of Ethiopia from the arrival of Christianity under King ʿEzana of Aksum in the 4th century into the 20th century. One of the clearest visual connections between the artworks used in the liturgies of the Coptic and Ethiopian Orthodox Churches is the predominance of images of the cross. The cross in the manuscript is mounted on a small pedestal in a form that recalls an ankh, the ancient Egyptian symbol for eternal life akin to the symbolism of the cross in Christianity. The crosses are filled with intricate interlace designs, which suggest a multiplication of the cross form.

Later Ethiopian illuminators incorporated complex interlace in various ways, as in the borders surrounding Saint Mark in the Gospel book and in the haräg (from the Gəʾəz word for “tendril”) that serves as the headpiece, or decorative heading, on the facing page. This 18th-century book of prayers displays a monumental interlace cross accompanying the Gospel text written in Coptic and Arabic, reflecting the multicultural society of Egypt at that time.

[OBJECT LABEL]
[ET.283]

Artist in Egypt
Textile panel with busts of kings, and horsemen and dancers, 8th–10th century
Wool and linen
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Mr. Kendall Berry, 83.740

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.284]

Artist in Egypt
Textile strip with a warrior battling a dragon, an angel, and a horseman hunting a lion, 7th century
Wool
The Walters Art Museum, museum purchase, 1982, 83.744

Due to Egypt's arid climate and the practice of placing textiles with the deceased in tombs, many richly decorated garments and fabric fragments survive. One frequent motif found on woven textiles is that of the horse and rider. A figure on horseback hunts a lion with an archangel or winged saint just above it while a warrior fights a dragon, recalling the figure of Saint George who slayed a dragon-like beast. The portability of textiles allowed these decorative motifs to travel to neighboring regions, including Ethiopia. These late antique Egyptian equestrian images may have provided one model for later images of George and other saints on horseback, central figures in Ethiopian Orthodox worship and iconography.

[SUBSECTION: Ethiopic Language]

[SUBSECTION PANEL: Ethiopic Language]

Ethiopic Language

The diversity of languages spoken in Ethiopia across time demonstrates the country's connections and significant role in global exchange. The Ethiopian rulers of the kingdom of Aksum initially used Greek as their administrative language due to their proximity to the Greek-speaking eastern Roman Empire. However, because of close connections across the Red Sea, Ethiopians also adopted the script of South Arabia. Classical Ethiopic, known as Gəʿəz, is a Semitic language that developed from South Arabia, with some characters carrying over to the Ethiopic alphabet. Gəʿəz was the language commonly used in ancient and early medieval Ethiopia, and later became used solely in liturgical activities and government documents. It is still taught to children in Sunday school—typically boys—as a way to learn the similar Amharic alphabet more commonly used in Ethiopia today.

[OBJECT LABEL AND ANNOTATION]
[ET.260]

Artist in Africa
Qurʾan board, 19th century
Wood, ink, and hide
The Walters Art Museum, museum purchase, 2007, 61.347

Students of Islam use wood writing surfaces like this one to memorize passages from Islam's holy book. Students can erase marks on the smooth surface by rinsing it with water. Because of the sacred nature of the Qurʾanic text, they collect the ink-filled liquid and save it for healing the faithful. Qurʾan boards are unique to Africa, with examples from East to West Africa, including Ethiopia.

[OBJECT LABEL]
[ET.024]

Processional cross, late 15th century
Brass
Minneapolis Institute of Art, The Robert J. Ulrich Works of Art Purchase Fund, 2009.39.1

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.016]

Wosene Worke Kosrof
Born 1950, Ethiopia
Works in the United States
Wax and Gold X, 2014
Acrylic on canvas
Jolene Tritt and Paul Herzog Collection

Painter and mixed media artist Wosene Worke Kosrof's style is characterized by abstract renderings of Amharic script, the Semitic language spoken most in Ethiopia and one of the few written systems indigenous to Africa. Each Amharic character is enlivened and transformed by Kosrof's composition, the line between word and image blurred by the distortion of the words and letters. He cites jazz as being highly influential in his creative process. Improvisations are deeply embedded in his work, visually and conceptually.

—Tsedaye Makonnen, multidisciplinary artist, curator, researcher, cultural producer, and daughter of Ethiopian refugees

[OBJECT LABEL AND ANNOTATION]
[ET.262]

Artist on the Arabian Peninsula
Inscribed stone block, mid-1st century
Limestone
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Giraud and Carolyn Foster, 2007, 21.46

This stone fragment displays an inscription written in South Arabian, one of the bases for the ancient Ethiopic alphabet known as Gəʿəz. The Ethiopic alphabet (fidäl) served as a teaching tool for students to learn Gəʿəz letter forms. The Ethiopic language appears not just in liturgical and historical texts, but also on Ethiopian painted icons, which often display identifying inscriptions.

[OBJECT LABEL]
[ET.264]

Täklä Maryam
Active mid-15th century, Ethiopia
Icon with Saint George, Christ, and saints, mid-15th century
Glue tempera on panel
Private collection

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.263, ET.261]

LEFT

Scribe in Gondär, Ethiopia
Student scroll with case, before 1931
Ink on parchment
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Dr. John R. and Rose Mary Iddings, 2001.32.8

RIGHT

Saint Yared the Aksumite Priest and Saint Ephrem Syrus
Ethiopic Psalter with Canticles, Song of Songs, and two hymns in praise of Mary
Ethiopia, early 18th century and 19th century
Ink and paint on parchment, wood board, and leather
The Walters Art Museum, museum purchase through the S. & A.P. Fund, 1960, W.768, fols. 29v–30r

This large and impressive manuscript begins with the Psalter—the 150 Psalms from the Hebrew Bible. It is one of the main texts used in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church liturgy. An Ethiopian royal family member commissioned a skilled scribe to write this book in Gəʿəz, the classical Ethiopic language used in Church ceremony. Contemporary artists, including Wosene Worke Kosrof, have found inspiration in the graphic quality of the Ethiopic alphabet.

[TACTILE ALPHABET INTERACTIVE]

Gəʿəz (pronounced *gih-iz*) is an ancient Ethiopian language developed more than 2,000 years ago. While Gəʿəz is no longer spoken in daily life, it is still used as the language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Learning requires practice and repetition in order to memorize the letter shapes of the language.

Run your fingers over a row of the Gəʿəz alphabet. What do you notice about the shapes?

[CARD]

[FRONT]

Many objects in this exhibition feature Gəʿəz words. Gəʿəz (pronounced *gih-iz*) is an ancient Ethiopian language developed more than 2,000 years ago.

[BACK]

Look closely as you explore. Can you recognize Gəʿəz on objects using the alphabet below?

What do the objects have in common? What differences do you notice?

[SECTION: ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY]

[SECTION PANEL]

Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity

King ʿEzana (reigned mid-4th century) adopted Christianity as the state religion in the 4th century, making Ethiopia the second oldest Christian nation in the world after Armenia. Traditional Ethiopian Christianity is part of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Many of its traditions have Jewish practices at their foundation, including the Saturday sabbath (in addition to one on Sunday), circumcision for boys, and dietary regulations drawn from kosher standards. The church continues to use objects related to the performance of the Ethiopian Orthodox liturgy—icons, processional crosses, liturgical manuscripts, and more. Artists decorate church environments with wall paintings depicting foundational stories from the Bible and the lives of the saints. The paintings serve as a backdrop for ceremonies and objects like these, enhancing their meaning.

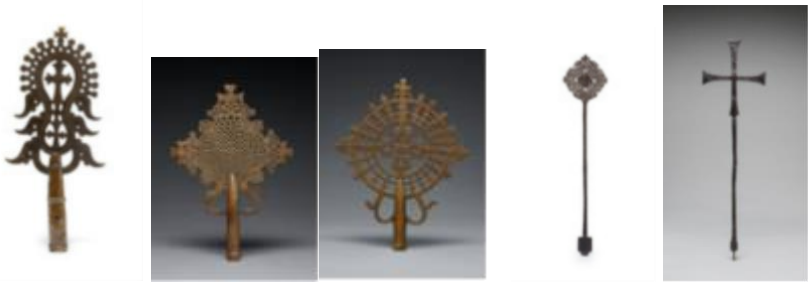
[SUBSECTION: Building a Local Christian Culture]

[SUBSECTION PANEL]

Building a Local Christian Culture

Ethiopia developed its own significant artistic traditions distinct from other cultures. Perhaps the most recognizable is the architecture of 11 churches in Lalibäla in northern Ethiopia, which were carved into the rock of the landscape. According to legend all of these were constructed under the patronage of King Lalibäla (1162–1221), after whom the present-day city and site are named. This period of architectural flourishing under the Zagwe dynasty (1137–1270) fed the demand for objects to furnish these churches—processional crosses for Church ceremonies, hand crosses used by the clerics for blessing, and illuminated manuscripts from which priests could perform the liturgy.

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.295, ET. 297, ET.299, ET.298, ET. 296]



Artist probably in Lasta, Ethiopia
Processional cross, 12th–13th century
Copper alloy
The Walters Art Museum, museum purchase with funds provided by the W. Alton Jones Foundation Acquisition Fund, 1996, 54.2889

Artist probably in Lalibäla, Ethiopia
Processional cross, 15th century
Bronze
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Nancy and Robert Nooter, 1997, 54.2942

Artist probably in Lasta, Ethiopia
Processional cross, 14th–15th century
Bronze
The Walters Art Museum, museum purchase with funds provided by the W. Alton Jones Foundation Acquisition Fund, 1996, 54.2890

Hand cross, 13th–15th century
Wrought iron
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Nancy and Robert Nooter, 1997, 52.296

Hand cross, 13th–15th century
Wrought iron
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Nancy and Robert Nooter, 1997, 52.297

Each individual Ethiopian Orthodox church had its own processional cross for use in various ceremonies. These crosses have a wide variety of shapes, with some of the common types connected to major centers of Christianity in the highlands of northern Ethiopia. The earliest surviving crosses have a distinctive pear shape.

The earliest surviving hand crosses, held and used by priests for blessing the faithful, date roughly to the 13th century, or slightly later. Artists forged these wrought iron examples by hand with a hammer over an open flame. Durable and abundant, this material was commonly sourced for these frequently handled crosses. Copper alloy, with its low melting point, was used for larger cast processional crosses and artists incised them with cast detailed decoration to adorn them. Some hand crosses are a simple equal-armed Greek-style cross on a long handle. Others reflect the four-lobed shape, called a quatrefoil.

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.193]

Artist in the Ethiopian highlands
Two-panel painting with King Lalibäla and Mäsqäl Kəbra, about 1500
Tempera on wood panel
Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio, purchased with funds from the Libbey Endowment, gift of Edward Drummond Libbey, 2021.38

The left panel of this painting commemorates King Lalibäla and Queen Mäsqäl Kəbra. The artist created this work almost 300 years after the king's death, a testament to his impact on Ethiopia's history and architectural landscape.

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.020, ET.300]

Saint John, late 14th–early 15th century
Tempera colors
The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, gift of Sam Fogg, Ms. 89, 2005.3 (verso)

Leaf from a Gospel book with Christ's Entombment, late 14th century
Ink and paint on parchment
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Knopfelmacher, 1996, W.839

These 14th-century Gospel book leaves represent some of the earliest Ethiopian manuscripts that survive. Followers at the island monasteries that circle Lake Ṭana in northern Ethiopia probably produced them. Portraits of the four evangelists who wrote the Gospel texts often feature in this type of book, as in a leaf depicting Saint John. Close in date and style is a leaf from a Gospel book that depicts Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus carrying the shrouded body of Christ to his tomb. These leaves are stylistically similar, and they are distinctively Ethiopian in their treatment of the figures, poses, and facial types, and in the overall composition.

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL]
[ET.111, ET.063]


Three-panel icon with the apparition of the Virgin Mary at Dayr al-Maġtas (Däbrä Məṭmaq), about 1740–55
Tempera on gesso-primed cotton on wood
Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University, IESMus4144

Two-panel icon with the Crucifixion (left) and the mocking of Christ (right), late 17th–early 18th century
Wood and polychrome
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Virginia, Robert and Nancy Nooter Collection, Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund, 2012.309a–b

[GROUP LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.318, ET.317, ET.327, ET.328, ET.319, ET.329, ET.321]

Pendant crosses, 19th century
Silver alloy
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Mrs. Lily Mobille-Pappas, 1997, 57.2254.4, 57.2254.17, 57.2254.24, , 57.2254.35, 57.2254.53, and 57.2254.54

Braided leather bracelet with attached pendant leather containers, probably 20th century
Leather
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Dr. John R. and Rose Mary Iddings, 2001.32.10

[SUBSECTION: Healing and Divination]

[SUBSECTION PANEL]

Healing and Divination

Parchment healing scrolls filled with written prayers and protective images were the primary means of traditional healing in Ethiopia. Their use is documented as early as the 15th century, though most examples that survive date from the 18th century to the present day. Ethiopians hung large healing scrolls on a wall or above a bed inside the home, while wearing smaller ones, along with other types of objects like silver crosses, painted icons with folding wings, and even small books in pouches, close to the heart for greatest efficacy. Today, contemporary Ethiopian artists continue to reflect on the historical cultivation of the divine through sacred and personal objects, while considering the connections among life and the afterlife.

These kinds of objects are found throughout the cultures Ethiopia interacted with during its long history, particularly in Armenia and in Muslim devotion. The desire to heal illness is universal, and the history of protective scrolls and talismans developed to address concerns of body or soul extends back to classical antiquity around the turn of the first millennium, and earlier, to ancient Nubia, Egypt, and Mesopotamia.

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.333, ET.334, ET.332, ET.239]

Scroll, 19th or 20th century
Ink and paint on parchment
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Dr. Giraud and Carolyn Foster, 2021, W.954

Scroll with the Lion of Judah, 19th century
Ink and paint on parchment
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Gene Guerny, 1997, W.845

Scroll, 19th or 20th century
Ink and paint on parchment
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Dr. Giraud and Carolyn Foster, 2021, W.947

Prayer scroll, 1710
Tempera and ink on paper
The Melikian Collection

These Ethiopian healing scrolls display some of the common types of imagery used for protective objects: figures with enlarged eyes, or eyes used as a repeating decorative motif, the eight-pointed star known as the Net of Solomon, a protective angel with a drawn sword, and the Lion of Judah, the symbol of the Israelite tribe of Judah and the Ethiopian Solomonic dynasty.

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.331, ET.225]

Prayer book, 20th century
Ink on parchment, wood board, and goatskin
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Dr. John R. and Rose Mary Iddings, 2001.32.1

Collection of prayers and Talismanic drawings, 19th century
Illuminated manuscript on vellum
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Virginia, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2016.232

Däbtära, lay clergy who create healing scrolls, rely on talismanic source books, such as the one here, to determine the most effective prayers and imagery for the person who commissioned the work to be made. These visual motifs also sometimes appear in other types of manuscripts, such as prayer books.

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.192]

Sälamat to Saint Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus and talismanic prayers, 17th century
Tempera and ink on parchment
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Virginia, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2016.231

Sälamat, or greetings, to Saint Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus and talismanic prayers and images cover this large parchment sheet. In this unusual example, the authors arranged texts on the page in four columns as if they were several scrolls lined up side by side.

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.330]

Artist in Northern Ethiopia
Scroll with angels and talismans, 18th century
Ink and paint on strips of parchment
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Mr. James St. Lawrence O'Toole, 1978, W.788

By displaying prayers and chosen images for an individual, healing scrolls eliminate illness. Each scroll is customized, inscribed with the name of its owner, and often made so that the length matches the height of the patron. Women commissioned the majority of scrolls, often seeking assistance for monthly pain and discomfort, conceiving a child, or childbirth. Martha, who was 5'5" tall, owned this one and she sought to ward off demons. The center of the scroll features an image of Phanuel who may have served as a guardian angel.

[GROUP LABEL WITH ANNOTATIONS]
[ET.073, ET.324, ET.322, ET.325]

LEFT

Artist in Armenia
Gospel book, about 1675–1725
Calf binding with mother-of-pearl, gilt-metal and bead headpiece ornament, metal thread, and silver coins
The Morgan Library & Museum, New York, purchased with the Herzog Fund, 2006, Ms.S M.1149

CENTER

Book with satchel, probably late 19th–early 20th century
Ink on parchment, wood board, and leather satchel

Prayer scroll with Archangel Michael and cross in a leather case, probably late 19th–early 20th century
Ink on parchment and leather case

The Walters Art Museum, gift of Dr. John R. and Rose Mary Iddings, 2001.32.5 and 2001.32.7

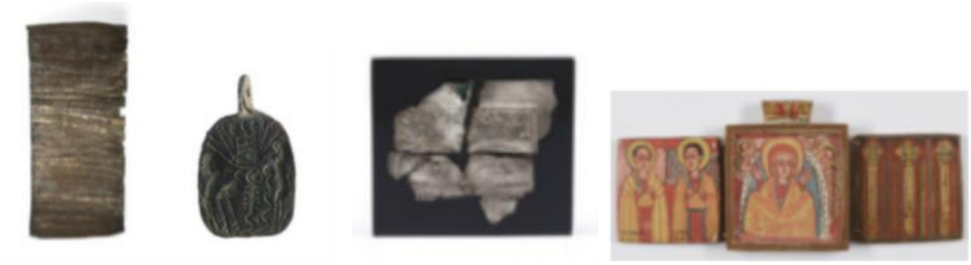
RIGHT

Artist in Yemen
Wearable box, late 19th–early 20th century
Silver alloy
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Dr. Giraud and Carolyn Foster, 2021, 57.2367

Worshippers in the ancient world valued scrolls, known as lamellae, consisting of thin metal sheets inscribed with prayers and charms. They rolled up and wore lamellae in a cylindrical metal capsule about the neck, much like Ethiopian healing scrolls. Another metal charm depicts a pair of open eyes that would act as a deterrent against the evil eye, a curse bestowed on someone through a malicious glare. A small bronze amulet pendant with an image of the all-suffering eye, a version of the evil eye, attacked by a lion, a snake, a scorpion, a stork, and spears had a similar function. Even the binding of this Armenian Christian manuscript was encrusted with charms, many of them meant to ward off the evil eye.

Muslims from Yemen wore elaborate metalwork neck boxes. They contained slips of paper or parchment, usually displaying passages from the Qurʾan that the owner had memorized.

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL]
[ET.323, ET.326, ET.316, ET.320]



Artist in the Byzantine Empire
Amulet with an inscription, 4th century
Silver
The Walters Art Museum, gift of the children of Robert Garrett, 57.1961

Artist in Israel
Amuletic pendant, 5th–6th century
Copper alloy
The Walters Art Museum, museum purchase, 1989, 54.2653

Artist in the Byzantine Empire
Plaque with eyes, about 600
Silver alloy
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Henri Seyrig, 1956, 57.1865.560

TOP

Artist probably in Gondär, Ethiopia
Double-sided two-panel icon with apparition of Virgin Mary at Dayr al-Maġtas (Däbrä Məṭmaq) (front center), archangels (front left), and saints (back center and left), late 17th century
Glue tempera on panel
The Walters Art Museum, museum purchase with funds provided by the W. Alton Jones Foundation Acquisition Fund, 1996, 36.8

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.242]

Merikokeb Berhanu
Born 1977, Ethiopia
Untitled XLIX, 2020
Acrylic on canvas
Courtesy of the artist and Addis Fine Art

Merikokeb Berhanu was born in Addis Abäba and trained there at the renowned Alle School of Fine Art and Design before relocating to Silver Spring, Maryland, in 2017. Since her arrival in the United States, she has addressed in her work the effects of a consumer society on nature. The central form in *Untitled XLIX* represents a flower filled with the cells that compose it, while the stem evokes the forms of circuit-boards, foregrounding the detrimental impact of modern-day humans and technology on the environment.

[MURAL CREDIT LINE CAPTION]

Ethiopian religious devotees in bright colors during the Meskel festival in Lalibäla, Ethiopia in 2011. Courtesy of the Walters Art Museum

[GROUP OBJECT LABELS WITH ANNOTATIONS]
[ET.198, ET.214, ET.197, ET.215]

FAR LEFT

Cross and sheath, probably 20th century
Brass and leather
PEM, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles R. Langmuir, 1979, E67906

LEFT AND CENTER

Qämis, probably 20th century
Cotton
PEM, gift of Mary E. Simpson, 1983, E72559

Dəbab, 20th century
Silk and velvet
PEM, gift of Charles R. and Elizabeth C. Langmuir, 1977, E68713

From the priests to practitioners, special clothing and accessories outfit individuals involved in Christian liturgy performance, while aqämis, or Ethiopian dress, is worn by women on holy day celebrations. People also wear white cotton garments with embroidered designs that reflect the wearer's home region. For example, a stitched cross motif associated with Gondär on this qämis reflects the diamond-shaped Gondärine cross of the 18th century and beyond. High-ranking clergy are also shaded by colorful dəbab, or umbrellas.

RIGHT

Shawl, probably 20th century
Cotton
PEM, gift of Charles R. and Elizabeth C. Langmuir, after 1973, E68695

This strikingly colored textile may have been used as a shamma, or shawl, a type of Ethiopian garment wrapped around the body and worn by men and women. White shamma with delicate colored embellishment at the ends are worn by Ethiopian Orthodox Christians on feast days.

[OBJECT LABEL]
[ET.200]

Crown, 18th–19th century
Brass
PEM, gift of Charles R. and Elizabeth C. Langmuir, 1979, E67938

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.241, ET.240]


Helina Metaferia
Born 1983, Washington, DC
Works in New York

Headdress 6, 2019
Collaged paper
Collection of Vence L. Bonham Jr. and Angela K. Bonham

Headdress 23, 2021
Collaged paper
Ian and Stacy Fleming

Helina Metaferia is a multidisciplinary artist born to Ethiopian immigrant parents. In her *Headdress* series, she depicts African American women whom she knows personally wearing elaborate headgear that recalls the types of crowns worn by Ethiopian empresses in the Gondärine period (1632–1769). She incorporates archival imagery from the American Civil Rights Movement, which in these two works is drawn from Black Panther newspapers from the Michigan State University Libraries' Radicalism Collection.

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.143, ET.255, ET.142, ET.123, ET.253]

BACK WALL, LEFT TO RIGHT

Hand cross, probably 15th–16th century
Cast silver alloy
Dallas Museum of Art, gift of Dr. Hebe Redden and Dr. Kenneth Redden, 1991.352.64

Hand cross with figure, 18th–19th century
Wood
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Nancy and Robert Nooter, 1997, 61.340

Hand cross, probably 19th–early 20th century
Wood
Dallas Museum of Art, gift of Dr. Hebe Redden and Dr. Kenneth Redden, 1991.352.16

Prayer-stick finial, 20th century
Brass
PEM, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles R. Langmuir, 1979 E67937

Artist in Egypt
Sistrum with handle in the shape of Bes, 1st–2nd century
Copper alloy
The Walters Art Museum, acquired by Henry Walters, 1913, 54.493

Metalwork objects like these continue to play a central role in the performance of Ethiopian Orthodox ceremonies and rituals by engaging the senses of those taking part. High-ranking officials, either royal or religious, might wear a metalwork crown (aklil or zäwd). Musical instruments like the sistrum (ṣänaṣəl), a kind of hand rattle made of metal, are used for percussion. The sistrum originates on the African continent and dates back to ancient Egypt, where it was wielded by priests and priestesses, and associated with the goddess Hathor or, as in the example shown here, with the god Bes, who was also connected with music.

PLATFORM, LEFT TO RIGHT

[ET.256, ET.040, ET.196, ET.254]

Pendant cross with ear pick, 19th century
Silver alloy
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Richard Hubbard Howland, 1998.21.1

Hand cross, about 1450
Iron
The Melikian Collection

Fly whisk, probably 20th century
Horsehair and wood
PEM, gift of Elizabeth C. Langmuir, 1987, E76156

Sistrum, about 1900
Copper alloy and wood
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Mr. Daniel M. Friedenberg, 1993, 54.2848

In Ethiopian Orthodox church ceremonies, each priest carries his own hand cross, used to bless the faithful. Early examples were made from iron and silver alloy, while later examples were made from wood carved with decorative interlace or figural designs. Fly whisks (mänäsanis) and earwax picks in the form of crosses play a role in the hygiene surrounding Christian ceremonies.

[SUBSECTION: The Paintings and Gospel Books of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity]

[SUBSECTION PANEL]

The Paintings and Gospel Books of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity

In Orthodox Christianity, icon paintings embody the essence of the divine or saintly figure depicted. Artists in Ethiopia began to produce icons during the 15th-century reign of Emperor Zärʾa Yaʿəqob, who decreed that every Ethiopian Christian church must have an icon of the Virgin Mary.

Ethiopian manuscript illuminators worked as early as the 14th century and generally depicted figures of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the evangelists with peach-colored flesh and European features. They drew upon earlier and contemporary Coptic (Christian Egyptian) and Byzantine manuscripts. However, some early examples represent the Gospel writers as African with darker complexions, a treatment that Ethiopian painters would fully embrace in the 18th century.

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.023 , ET.234, ET.235, ET.236]

Album leaves with the entombment of Christ (far left), the Ascension of Christ (center left), the Assumption of the Virgin (center right), and Saint George (far right), late 17th century
Pigments on vellum
Minneapolis Institute of Art, The Robert J. Ulrich Works of Art Purchase Fund 2009.39.3y, bb, dd, and oo

This set of leaves comes from a series of 44 total. The works exhibit a similar figural style and palette as the manuscript from Šäwa in the case to your right, suggesting they may have been produced in the city of Šäwa. These leaves, now matted separately, are large in scale. However, they were originally arranged in series and likely painted on several long sheets of parchment sewn together and folded accordion-style to form a sənsul, or chained manuscript.

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.250]

Artist at the monastery of Gundä Gunde in Ethiopia
Folding processional icon in the shape of a fan, late 15th century
Ink and paint on parchment, sinew, and cotton thread
The Walters Art Museum, museum purchase with funds provided by the W. Alton Jones Foundation Acquisition Fund, 1996, 36.9

This long fan, constructed of six rectangular parchment sheets, depicts 38 standing figures of prophets, apostles, and saints placed side by side and facing inward in pairs, as if they are in conversation. The artist folded the parchment like an accordion with each end originally attached to a flat wood board. By bringing the boards together to meet, the object becomes a pleated circular icon in the form of a fan, with the figure of the Virgin Mary at top. This unusual type of icon, carried in Christian processions, seems to have originated in the Ethiopian highlands. Only seven of these are currently known to survive, six in Ethiopia and this one in the Walters Art Museum collection.

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.117]

Fəre Ṣəyon
Active 1445–1480, Ethiopia
Three-panel icon with the Virgin Mary and Christ child flanked by archangels and saints (center), twelve apostles and saints (left), and prophets and saints (right), mid- to late 15th century
Tempera on gesso-primed wood
Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University, IESMus4186

Fəre Ṣəyon, a leading Ethiopian artist working at Zärʾa Yaʿəqob's court, painted this three-paneled icon featuring the Virgin and Child at center. Ṣəyon likely introduced one of the characteristic features of Ethiopian icons of Mary and Christ: the archangels Michael and Gabriel, who flank the central figures holding drawn swords and acting as a kind of honor guard.

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL]
[ET.249, ET.248, ET.247]

Double-sided leaves from a sənsul, about 16th century

Saints James (Jacob) and Matthias
An unidentified saint and Saint Thaddeus
Saints James and John, sons of Zebedee

Ink and paint on parchment
The Walters Art Museum, gift of the Reverend R. K. Le Fleur, 2014, W.928 (verso), W.929 (verso), and W.927 (recto)

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.244, ET.067]

Artist in Təgray, Ethiopia
Three-panel icon with the Virgin Mary and Christ child flanked by archangels, early 17th century
Glue tempera on panel
The Walters Art Museum, museum purchase with funds provided by the W. Alton Jones Foundation Acquisition Fund, 1996, 36.4

Sənsul with embossed leather cover, 15th–early 16th century
Parchment, ink, paint, and leather
PEM, gift of Charles R. and Elizabeth C. Langmuir, 1979, E67892

A reader can open this sənsul at full length to reveal a series of saints or open it like a book with two pages open in the palm of the hand. Saint George, the patron saint of Ethiopia, frequently appears with the Virgin and Child at the center of sənsuls. Many of these manuscripts are just a few inches tall and were likely used in personal devotion.

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.018]

Artist at the monastery Gundä Gunde, Ethiopia
Gospel book with prophets and apostles, about 1480–1520
Tempera on parchment and wood boards
The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. 105, 2010.17, fols. 6v-7

This manuscript contains a complex program of illumination, featuring a series of opening images that depict rows of prophets, apostles, and saints shown as if they are participating in a feast day procession.

The monastery of Gundä Gunde, on the border of present-day Ethiopia and Eritrea, produced luxury Gospel books filled with multiple images, like this one, from the 15th through the early 16th centuries.

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.118]

RIGHT

Outer wings of a three-panel icon with equestrian saints, mid- to late 15th century
Tempera on gesso-primed cotton on wood
Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University, IESMus4053

These panels depict the figures of numerous saints, most shown on horseback, such as Saint George, the patron saint of Ethiopia, on the left panel in the upper right corner. Equestrian saints, dressed in the 15th-century clothing of Ethiopian nobility, were especially popular among Christians at the royal court who trained in horsemanship, and who therefore could relate their lives to those of holy figures.

[OBJECT LABEL]
[ET.186]

LEFT

Gospel book leaf with Saint John, 16th century
Tempera and ink on parchment
Private collection

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.258]

Archangel Michael and crossing of the Red Sea, mid-19th century
Glue tempera on overlapping canvas pieces
The Walters Art Museum, museum purchase with funds provided by an anonymous donor, 2001, 36.13.1

Large-scale painted murals appear in several locations in Ethiopian churches, including on the doors to the mäqdäs, the church sanctuary, a space only accessible to priests and deacons. One of the most common images on these doors is of archangels, the highest order of angels who are armed with swords and positioned as protectors of the sanctuary space beyond. In this example, the monumental figures of the archangels Michael and Raphael serve this purpose.

[OBJECT LABEL]
[ET.259]

Archangel Raphael and the miracle of the sea monster, mid-19th century
Glue tempera on overlapping canvas pieces

The Walters Art Museum, museum purchase with funds provided by an anonymous donor, 2001, 36.13.2

[OBJECT LABEL]
[ET.099]

Mänbärä tabot (altar chest) icon with eight panels and painted scenes, about 1850
Carved wood and glue tempera
Private collection, USA

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL]
[ET.257, ET.183]

Book of hymns for the funeral ritual Mäwaśə'ət, 19th century
Ink on parchment, wood boards, and leather
The Walters Art Museum, gift of the Reverend R. K. Le Fleur, 2014, W.931

Hymns accompanying Täʾammərä Maryam (Miracles of Mary), 17th century
Tempera and ink on parchment
Private collection

[SECTION: ENCOUNTERS]

[SECTION PANEL]

Encounters

Early in the Middle Ages, Armenia—the first Christian nation—established extensive trade routes including into Ethiopia, resulting in an exchange of ideas, liturgical objects, and even script.

In the early 7th century, Ethiopia offered a safe haven to persecuted Muslim exiles in the eastern part of the country. Harär gained special status as the fourth holy city of Islam and the major center of Qur'anic study. Islamic and Christian textual and manuscript traditions in Ethiopia developed in tandem.

Beginning in the 15th century, the Ethiopian royal court sent envoys to Italy, Spain, and Portugal. In turn, Venetian monks began to paint at the Ethiopian court. Ethiopian and Italian artists had a relationship of exchange and drew on one another's compositions, techniques, and materials.

The Jesuit order began to utilize Portuguese sea routes in the 16th century, attempting to convert the cultures along them to Roman Catholicism. Though the Jesuits' evangelization attempts met little success in Ethiopia and they were expelled in 1632, they left visual iconography that Ethiopian artists adopted and adapted.

[SUBSECTION: Armenia]

[SUBSECTION PANEL]

Armenia

Armenia and Ethiopia have deep historic connections because of their status as the first and second nations to adopt Christianity as state religions. Armenian and Ethiopian clerics lived side by side in places like Jerusalem in the centuries that followed, where they exchanged ideas and likely also manuscripts, textiles, and small devotional and liturgical objects. As with Ethiopia and Byzantium, the circulation of artistic motifs between the cultures is especially clear in the decoration of Gospel books with shared decorative patterns and animal forms, and in the centrality of the cross.

Early in the Middle Ages, Armenians also established trade routes branching out from the Caucasus to the Arabian Peninsula, the Mediterranean, east into Asia, and south into Africa, including Ethiopia. An Armenian quarter still exists today in central Addis Abäba, which demonstrates the enduring link between Ethiopia and Armenia.

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.188]

Yovsian of Vaspurakan
Active in Armenia, 14th century
Leaf from a Gospel book with Christ's Resurrection and visit of the women to the tomb of Christ, about 1350
Tempera on cotton paper
Private collection

The artist Yovsian of Vaspurakan, from the Lake Van region of eastern Türkiye (Turkey), decorated both sides of this leaf from a Gospel book with several scenes from the end of Christ's life. He executed the figures with vibrant pen-drawn outlines and filled them in with washes of color to create swirling drapery and expressive gestures.

[OBJECT LABEL AND ANNOTATION]
[ET.223]

Artist in Armenia
Leaf from a Gospel book, 14th–15th century
Tempera and ink on paper
The Melikian Collection

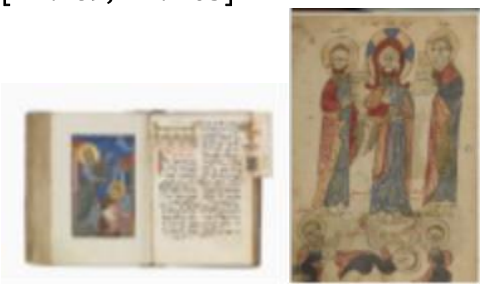
Artists in Armenia drew upon the forms of canon tables, shown in the illuminated Gospel books displayed in this section. They continued to include the decorative motif of the archway in later manuscripts. This leaf displays an arch surmounted by a lion and surrounded on three sides by long-necked birds drinking from vessels.

[OBECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.112]

Three-panel icon with the Crucifixion (center), entombment and guards at the tomb (left), and temptation in the wilderness and the Resurrection of Christ (right), late 16th century
Tempera on gesso-primed wood
Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University, IESMus4126

The soft, fluid figures painted by Armenian artists from the Lake Van region find later echoes in this Ethiopian three-panel icon. The artist here similarly draws the figures' drapery with fine, wavy lines. Some of the figures wear pointed turbans, and at lower right Christ wears a short-sleeved, knee-length jacket with frog closures, and bunched sleeves and trousers, both of which reflect clothing from regions east of Africa. These details of painting style and dress may derive from Armenian illuminated manuscripts and paintings, and perhaps Armenian artists working alongside Ethiopian artists.

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATIONS]
[ET.189, ET. 103]



LEFT TO RIGHT

Artist in Armenia
Gospel book with the opening to the Gospel of Matthew, 13th century
Tempera and ink on paper
Private collection

An Armenian manuscript produced in Cilicia, Türkiye (Turkey), depict the evangelist Matthew in his study before an architectural backdrop, and the detail of an undulating scroll draped over a stand appears in this manuscript. A Greek inscription further identifies the evangelist, underscoring the fluid exchange of scribes and artists between Armenia and the Byzantine world.

Petros
Active in Türkiye (Turkey)
Gospel book with the Ascension, 1386
Ink and watercolors
The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. Ludwig II 6 (83.MB.70), fols. 12v-13

Armenian artist Petros illuminated this Gospel book and a single leaf near Lake Van in present-day eastern Türkiye. He approached the depiction of figures in Christian narratives in a manner distinctive of that region. Here, he painted figures that gesture dramatically and seem to vibrate with energy, and their swirling drapery does not conform to the shape of the bodies beneath. He also compressed multiple Gospel stories into a single page, resulting in dense compositions.

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.191, ET.190]

LEFT

Christ's entry into Jerusalem, folios from an earlier Gospel book added to a Täʾammərä Maryam manuscript, 14th century
Tempera and ink on parchment
Private collection

Illuminated Gospel books from the Eastern Orthodox Churches commonly feature cycles of images drawn from the life of Christ. These two examples of Christ's triumphal Entry into Jerusalem therefore share a similar sensibility in terms of their composition and means of visual storytelling. In this Ethiopian book, the artist arranged the onlookers in stacked rows of figures with Christ on the donkey centered among them. The scene continues on the facing page with additional figures reaching out toward Christ and others looking on from above the gates of Jerusalem. At right, the Armenian example displays an even denser composition, compressed into a single miniature, with additional rows of figures and Christ riding sidesaddle embedded among them.

RIGHT

Artist in Armenia
Gospel book with Christ's entry into Jerusalem and the Last Supper, 15th century
Watercolor and ink on paper
Private collection

[SUBSECTION: Islam in Ethiopia]

[SUBSECTION PANEL]

Islam in Ethiopia

Islam arrived in Ethiopia soon after the faith's origins in the early 7th century, during the Prophet Muhammad's lifetime. In 619, Ethiopia offered safe haven to persecuted Muslim exiles from Mecca at his request. Long-established trade between the Arabian Peninsula and Ethiopia, across the Red Sea, promoted the growth of Islam in Ethiopia as well as the transfer of manuscripts and books. Ethiopian Muslims went to Yemen to study, and the city of Harär in eastern Ethiopia became an important center of Islamic learning. Study of the Qurʾan required handwritten and illustrated copies of the text, as well as carved Qurʾan boards on which students wrote passages down in order to memorize them. Artisans in Harär, mostly Muslim women, also developed traditions of basket weaving displaying decorative patterns filled with symbolic meaning. Today, roughly a third of Ethiopia's population is Muslim, making Islam the second most practiced religion in the country.

[SUBSECTION: Harär, Holy City of Islam]

[SUBSECTION PANEL]

Harär, Holy City of Islam

The walled city of Harär in the Eastern part of Ethiopia became the major center of Qurʾanic study and Islamic book production, gaining special status as the fourth holy city of Islam. Here, local artists distinctively used borders and circular frames to contain writing in handwritten volumes of the Qurʾan. Harari women weave natural materials like grasses into decoratively patterned covered baskets, bowls, and other vessels. Weaving spaces are blessed with prayers to Allah and the Prophet Muhammad. Women pray before and during a weaving session, and some decorate baskets with quotes from the Qurʾan.

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.210, ET.211, ET.032, ET.209, ET.201, ET.213

BACK ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT

Haräri artists

Lidded basket, 20th century
Plant fibers
PEM, museum collection, before 1867, E4645

Basket, 20th century
Plant fibers and tanned hide
PEM, gift of Alvin P. Johnson, 1950, E28778

Hamat mot (mother-in-law basket), 20th century
Straw and leather
Minneapolis Institute of Art, The Miscellaneous Works of Art Purchase Fund, 75.21

FRONT ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT

Lidded basket, 19th century
Plant fibers
PEM, museum collection, before 1867, E4642

Basket, 20th century
Plant fibers

PEM, gift of Alvin P. Johnson, 1950, E28780

Lidded basket, 20th century
Plant fibers
PEM, museum collection, before 1962, E37683

Women from Harär weave various forms of baskets from dyed grasses and leather, sometimes adorning them with cowrie shells. The women of the household use these colorful baskets as home decoration. They arrange dozens of them together, each one with a different pattern, in vibrant wall displays. Beyond the baskets' aesthetic appeal, they serve a practical function as containers for storing and serving spices and food, like injera, sourdough pancakes typically made from the native teff grain that accompanies meals in Ethiopia and Eritrea.

The basket weavers developed distinctive designs to convey messages to the viewer or recipient of the vessel. Of special significance is the hamat mot, a large woven vessel with a complex pattern that a woman weaves and presents to her husband's mother within a year of their marriage. Mother-in-laws prominently display these gift baskets on the walls of their homes.

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.293, ET.291, ET.294, ET.292]

LEFT TO RIGHT

Artist probably in West Africa
Qurʾan with leather satchel, 19th century
Ink and paint on paper, board, leather satchel, and Qurʾan folios
The Walters Art Museum, museum purchase with funds provided by the Islamic Acquisition Fund, 2000, W.853.1, fols. 2b–3a, and W.853.1.REL.1

Artist in Maghreb
Qurʾan, 12th century
Ink and paint on parchment and gold-tooled goatskin
The Walters Art Museum, acquired by Henry Walters, W.556, fols. 30A-129B

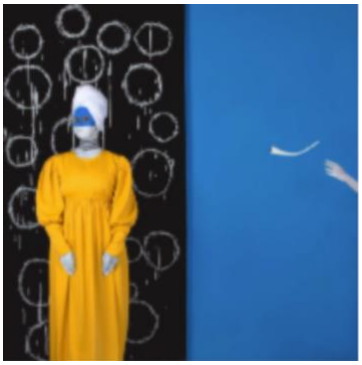
Islamic scribes produced manuscripts across the African continent. African Qurʾans were made earlier in the Maghreb region in northwest Africa, as in this 12th-century example. The Qurʾan here exhibits decoration that recalls the book arts from Harär, which demonstrates the stylistic connections throughout the African Qurʾan tradition. Maḫdär, the leather carrying cases shown here, made manuscripts easily portable. Owners hung them on pegs high on a wall to elevate the holy books off the ground.

Prayer book, 18th century
Ink and paint on parchment
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Gene Guerny, 1997, W.844, fols. ii, v–1r

Prayer book with leather satchel, 19th or 20th century
Ink on parchment and leather
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Dr. Giraud and Carolyn Foster, 2021, W.958, fols. 2v–3r, and W.958.REL.1

This small prayer book displays Arabic and Gəʿəz texts on facing pages at the beginning of the manuscript. The late 19th-century date written on the Arabic page indicates that this text may have been added later. Nevertheless, the book demonstrates the interaction between people of different Abrahamic faiths in Ethiopia.

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.340]



Aïda Muluneh
Born 1974, Ethiopia
Works in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire
Love, The Contradiction of Pain, printed 2023
From the series *Mirror of the Soul*, edition of 7, 2019
Inkjet print
PEM, museum purchase, by exchange, 2023.33.5

The motivation for the piece was to express the notion of false faith or blind faith. For me, it was a matter of questioning how we define our own spirituality and in relation to our mortality. As a nation, we are engulfed in our faith while our actions would be deemed faithless. Regardless of which Divine we choose to bow to, at times I feel that we have lost our path as a nation of citizens with humility.

Hence, the yellow dress is symbolic of eternal faith. The wires with white paint . . . portray faith but behind us is the suffering of many, whom are voiceless and faceless. The horn is symbolic of hesitation in communication.

—Aïda Muluneh, artist

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.341]

Aïda Muluneh
Born 1974, Ethiopia
Works in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire
Addis Neger, printed 2023
From the series *Mirror of the Soul*, edition of 7, 2019
Inket print
PEM, museum purchase, by exchange, 2023.33.4

In this piece . . . I wanted to recreate an abstract version of the rural woman as I imagine her, in the daily chores of tradition. The title *Addis Neger*, has a double meaning: one translates to "new things" and the other to "new troubles." She is spinning cotton into a thread, which reminds me of . . . my grandmother who used to do it—it's quite beautiful to watch, but [this art form is] slowly fading as women enter the workforce. [Inside the] yellow frame is the fly swatter that you would often see elders [and priests] carrying around. This one was the one my grandmother would always have with her. I wanted to symbolize loss of tradition and the disconnect of the different generations. If you look closely, she is spinning barbed wires, symbolic of the countless rumors that spread throughout the countryside causing great strife . . . that turn neighbors on each other, displacement of masses, killings and destruction. We are all closed off in our homes and within our walls, yet we either feel helpless or continue to fan the flames.

—Aïda Muluneh, artist

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.337]

Aïda Muluneh
Born 1974, Ethiopia
Works in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire
The Certainty of the Uncertainty, printed 2023
From the series *Mirror of the Soul*, edition of 7, 2019
Inket print
PEM, museum purchase, by exchange, 2023.33.6

The color green . . . is inspired by Islamic usage of the color to represent abundance and paradise, in a sense the oasis. The background is painted with stencils of Jebena, the Ethiopian coffee pot. As the birthplace of coffee, coffee is a central part of our culture as a way of coming together and exchanging news. In this instance, it is symbolically placed to express the spreading of rumors and gossip. On the green board is the map of Ethiopia with borders [of] various ethnic groups. The book reads in Amharic "Ye seamy Enjera," which loosely means "an unattainable dream," . . . symbolically representing the Bible. The horn is symbolic of deaths whenever there is political strife . . . . Across Africa, we witness the transformation of nations but through the veils, our country continues to divide and our mothers weep for the lost future. I wanted to express this piece to those who become victims of the political chess game.

—Aïda Muluneh, artist

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.038, ET.041, ET.039]

LEFT

Artist in Harär, Ethiopia
Qurʾan, 1773
Ink on paper
The Melikian Collection

Harär is one of the oldest centers of Qurʾan production in sub-Saharan Africa. The scribes and artists of the city developed a particular style for special copies of the Qurʾan. They framed the text with red and white interlace or leaf-filled borders, sometimes rectangular and other times circular. This color palette is similar to that of Qurʾan manuscripts from neighboring Egypt, Arabia, and Yemen. Scribes later in the 19th century wrote Haräri commentaries on the Qurʾan diagonally in the margins of a Qurʾan, creating a multilevel interpretation of the text as well as a visually engaging page composition. Qurʾan manuscripts from Ethiopia were frequently written on paper from Europe, often Italy, attesting to the country's central place in trade networks that extended north to Europe and south through the Red Sea region.

RIGHT

Artist probably in Harär, Ethiopia
Qur'an, 1844
Ink on paper
The Melikian Collection

Artist in Harär, Ethiopia
Book of eulogies and prayers to the Prophet Muhammad, late 19th century
Ink on paper
The Melikian Collection

[SUBSECTION: Europe]

[SUBSECTION PANEL]

Europe

Beginning in the 15th century, the Ethiopian royal court sent a series of envoys to Europe, namely to Italy, Spain, and Portugal. The first documented journey took place in 1402, when an Ethiopian delegation went to Venice and requested luxury liturgical items and skilled craftsmen to take back to their home country. Encounters between Ethiopia and Europe did not only occur as part of official envoys. Christian travelers from these locales intermingled in cities as far apart as Rome and Jerusalem, fostering the exchange of ideas and images. It was in the 15th century that panel paintings, in the form of Christian icons, began to be produced for the first time in Ethiopia.

[OBJECT LABEL]
[ET.290]

Bifolium from a Gospel book with canon tables, late 14th–early 15th century
Ink and paint on parchment
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Knopfelmacher, 1996, W.838, fols. 1v–2r

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.042]

Artist probably in Harär, Ethiopia
Homilies of Saint Michael, 18th century
Tempera and ink on parchment
The Melikian Collection

Textiles played a central role in the artistic production of the Ethiopian court and Church in this period, and demonstrated the royal appetite for fabrics from the East, especially India, but also Europe. Patterns appear in painted images of biblical and saintly figures, as in the Homilies of Michael manuscript. The inside cover of the manuscript displays a textile lining under the leather turn-ins, as many Ethiopian books of this period have.

[OBJECT LABEL]
[ET.184]

Tewodros
Active early 18th century, Ethiopia
Folding book, early to mid-18th century
Tempera and ink on parchment
Private collection

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.302, ET.303]

Fəre Ṣəyon
Active 1445–1480, Ethiopia
Panel from an icon with the Virgin Mary and Christ child and archangels Michael and Gabriel, about 1445–80
Glue tempera on panel
Private collection

Workshop of Bartolomeo Vivarini, Venice, Italy
Madonna and Child, about 1485
Egg tempera on panel
The Walters Art Museum, acquired by Henry Walters, 37.1218

The two paintings of the Virgin Mary and Christ child from the 15th century—one by the Ethiopian court artist Fəre Ṣəyon and the other by the workshop of the Venetian artist Bartolomeo Vivarini—exhibit many similarities in terms of composition, and in the pose, gestures, and interaction of Mary and Christ. Fəre, however, transformed European traditions of religious imagery into Ethiopian visual language. He employed the characteristically Ethiopian palette of red, yellow, green, and blue, and he foreground elaborate textile patterns on the figures' garments.

[OBJECT LABEL]
[ET.113,]

Probably Niccolò Brancaleon
Born Venice, Italy
Active 1480–1520, Ethiopia
Two-panel icon with the Virgin Mary and Christ child flanked by angels (left) and the Crucifixion (right), late 15th–early 16th century
Tempera on gesso-primed wood
Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University, IESMus4325

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.171, ET.121]

TOP

Panel from an icon with Saint George and Abba Gäbrä Märʿawi, late 15th–early 16th century
Tempera, gold, and gesso on wood
Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University, IESMus6996B

This icon from Ethiopia drew upon artistic traditions from many areas of Europe. Venetian painter Niccolò Brancaleon, who was documented as working at the court of Ethiopian king Zärʾa Yaʿəqob, may have painted this panel. He modeled his composition after a well-known icon made on the island of Crete in a Byzantine style, and he included several angels who capture Christ's blood in chalices, a motif first developed in northern Europe.

The artist painted two saints of local importance in Ethiopia, but each of them has a gold halo, a material avoided by Ethiopian and Italian artists in Ethiopia, and the figures' proportions are more slender than those painted by Ethiopian or Italian artists. These details may point to a European artist from outside Italy.

BOTTOM

Two-panel icon with Saint George above Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus (left) and the Virgin Mary and Christ child flanked by archangels above saints (right), 18th century
Tempera on gesso-primed wood
Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University, IESMus3703

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.308]

Erhard Reuwich
1445 the Netherlands–1505 Germany
Bernhard von Breydenbach's *Peregrinatio in terram sanctam*, 1486
Ink on paper
The Walters Art Museum, acquired by Henry Walters, 1920, 91.283, fols. 72v–73r

During 1483–84, the German politician Bernhard von Breydenbach traveled on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, a city central to all three major Abrahamic religions. Two years later, he published an account of his voyage in this volume. He explored different quarters of Jerusalem, where he encountered people from Armenia, Coptic Egypt, Syria, Greece, and elsewhere. Breydenbach was the first to publish the Ethiopic alphabet in printed form, alongside Erhard Reuwich's drawings of Ethiopian people. One of the figures here is in priestly dress and another in the attire of a layperson.

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.129]

Psalter with Wəddase Maryam (Praise of Virgin Mary) and Canticles of the Prophets with the Virgin and Child, about 15th century
Ink and pigments on parchment and wood board
Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio, Mrs. George W. Stevens Fund, 2021.37

This manuscript depicts the biblical figures of Mary and Christ as dark complexioned. The depiction is an early instance of an Ethiopian artist representing holy figures that reflect the Ethiopian population. As an insider, this artist created the image as a means of self-representation. This treatment became common later in 18th-century Ethiopian painting.

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.128, ET.304, ET.307, ET.306, ET.305]

FAR LEFT AND LEFT

Panel from an icon with the Virgin Mary and Christ child, 15th or early 16th century
Wood and pigments
PEM, gift of Charles R. and Elizabeth C. Langmuir, 1979, E67889

Follower of Fəre Ṣəyon
Active 1445–1480, Ethiopia
Worked in Təgray, Ethiopia
Two-panel icon with the Virgin Mary and Christ child, late 15th century
Glue tempera on panel
The Walters Art Museum, museum purchase, W. Alton Jones Foundation Acquisition Fund, 2001, Nancy and Robert Nooter Collection, 36.12

CENTER AND RIGHT

Two-panel icon with Saint George (left) and the Virgin Mary and Christ child (right), early 15th century
Glue tempera on panel
The Walters Art Museum, museum purchase, 2004, 36.16

Follower of Niccolò Brancaleon
Venice, Italy
Active 1480–1520, Ethiopia
Panel from an icon with the Virgin Mary and Christ child flanked by angels, about 1500
Glue tempera on panel
The Walters Art Museum, museum purchase with funds provided by an anonymous donor, 2002, 36.15

FAR RIGHT

Panel from an icon with the Virgin Mary and Christ child, late 15th century
Glue tempera on panel
The Walters Art Museum, museum purchase with funds provided by an anonymous donor, 2002, 36.14

The icons in this case represent the most popular images portrayed in 15th-century Ethiopian icons: the Virgin and Child and Saint George, the patron saint of Ethiopia. Ethiopian artists who followed the style of Ethiopian court painter Fəre Ṣəyon painted the three of these. Notice how Italian artists at the Ethiopian court adopted an Ethiopian painting style and palette. Conservation and technical analysis conducted at the Walters Museum of Art allowed us to compare the artists' techniques as they worked side by side and exchanged ideas.

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.139, ET.137, ET.138, ET.136]

LEFT TO RIGHT

Processional cross with Gəʿəz inscription, 19th century
Silver
Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio, gift of the Popplestone Family, 2006.71

Medal of the Order of Solomon's Seal, 20th century
Silver
PEM, gift of Charles R. and Elizabeth C. Langmuir, 1979, E67920

Maria Theresa thaler neck cross, 20th century
Silver
PEM, gift of Charles R. and Elizabeth C. Langmuir, 1979, E67927

Medal of the Lion of Judah (Medal of the Order of Emperor Menelik II), 20th century
Silver
PEM, gift of Charles R. and Elizabeth C. Langmuir, 1979, E67917

Artists used European silver coins to create Ethiopian crosses, exemplifying the trade and exchange among the countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea that continues to the present day. The Holy Roman Empire minted the original Maria Theresa thaler, a large silver coin. It circulated from 1741 to 1857. It held value as currency in Ethiopia beginning in the late 18th or early 19th century and provided a pure source for the silver. Artists used the coins to create small pendant crosses to be worn around the neck. In other instances, makers hammered the thaler to reduce the relief profile of the Maria Theresa portrait, and stamped a cross shape out of the coin.

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.059]

Aïda Muluneh
Born 1974, Ethiopia
Works in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire
All in One, 2016
From the series *The World is 9*, 2016
Inkjet print
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Fund for the Twenty-First Century, 271.2018

Aïda Muluneh is an Addis Abäba–based photographer whose practice incorporates body painting—inspired by traditional African body art—as well as primary colors, which are reminiscent of traditional Ethiopian church paintings. This work is from the series *The World is 9*, which responds to the uncertainties and challenges of life. She centers women in her photographic portraits as a way to connect to the collective subconscious of women—specifically Black women—and their experiences as they navigate questions of life, belonging, past, present, and future.

—Tsedaye Makonnen, multidisciplinary artist, curator, researcher, cultural producer, and daughter of Ethiopian refugees

[SUBSECTION: The Jesuit Missions]

[SUBSECTION PANEL]

The Jesuit Missions

By the 16th century, sea routes established by the Portuguese connected Europe with Africa and Asia via the Mediterranean, Red Sea, and Indian Ocean. Ethiopia, with its Red Sea port cities, was a way station for voyagers traveling in both directions, which fostered broad cross-cultural exchange.

The Society of Jesus, or the Jesuits, is a Catholic religious order founded in 1540 by Saint Ignatius of Loyola. At the time, the group took advantage of these trade routes to attempt to convert the cultures along them to Roman Catholicism. Their attempts at evangelization were met with great resistance in Ethiopia, where Orthodox Christianity was well established. Emperor Fasilädäs, the successor of his father Susənyos, expelled the Jesuits in 1632.

While the Jesuits were not successful in their conversion efforts, their presence in the country led to artistic exchanges that altered Ethiopian Christian art. Ethiopian artists adopted some of the European Catholic images that Jesuits brought with them. Local artists transformed them into Ethiopian images by adjusting details of the compositions and the color palette.

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.110]

Three-panel icon with the Virgin Mary and Christ child flanked by archangels (center), 12 apostles and Saint George (left), and 15 prophets and patriarchs (right), late 15th–early 16th century
Tempera on gesso-primed wood
Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University, IESMus6617

This icon displays Ethiopian artists' treatment of the image of the Virgin and Child in the 15th century, prior to the arrival of the Jesuits. The Archangels Michael and Gabriel frame the central figures, and Mary cradles the infant Christ with her right arm. Ethiopian artists also favored prominent floral patterns beginning in this period and continuing into the Jesuit period, as seen on Mary's garments, probably based upon the designs of imported textiles.

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.010]

Two-panel icon with Kʷərʿatä rəʾəsu (left) and Deposition (right), after 1700
Wood, paint, leather, and iron hinges (later addition)
Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of African Art, Washington, DC, gift of Joseph and Patricia Brumit, 2004-7-3

The Jesuits introduced imagery of Christ as the Man of Sorrows to Ethiopia. After their arrival in the country, artists created works representing Christ wearing the Crown of Thorns and displaying the wounds from the physical abuse he endured before his death on the cross. In Ethiopia, this image came to be called Kʷərʿatä rəʾəsu (Striking of His Head), and became an icon of great importance in individual devotion as well as in collective worship. This large-scale version, paired with Christ being lowered from the cross after his Crucifixion, was meant to evoke an emotional response to Christ's suffering from the viewer.

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION AND REFERENCE IMAGE]
[ET.066]

Three-panel icon with the Virgin Mary and Christ child (center), the Crucifixion (left), and the descent into limbo (right), 17th century
Tempera on wood
PEM, gift of Charles R. and Elizabeth C. Langmuir, 1979, E67887

Jesuits carried prints of an 11th- to 13th-century painted icon of the Virgin and Child from the church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. After they brought this image to Ethiopia, the position of the Christ child in Ethiopian painting changed from resting on Mary's right arm to resting on her left. The artist also incorporated other details from the icon, including the position of Mary's right hand, with her fingers pointing downward in a gesture of blessing.

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.165]

Artist in Ethiopia or India
Three-panel icon with Saint George slaying the dragon, mid-17th to early 18th century
Pigments on copper and gesso-covered wood panels
Private collection of Dr. Kenneth Robbins

This panel, found in Ethiopia, reflects styles from the East. The folding wings decorated with floral motifs are Indian in style. The central panel here is a painting of Saint George slaying the dragon, a popular theme in Ethiopian icons, but executed here in a Mughal style. The Mughals ruled an empire based in India from 1526 to 1857. This work may have been imported from the Asian subcontinent. Alternatively, an artist from India might have created

it for the Ethiopian royal court, which demonstrates the contacts between Ethiopia and India that the Jesuits reinforced during this period.
[SUBSECTION: Gondär: Local Kingship and Artistic Patronage]

[SUBSECTION PANEL]

Gondär: Local Kingship and Artistic Patronage

Beginning in the early 17th century, the city of Gondär became the political and cultural center of Ethiopia for more than two centuries. Emperor Fasilädäs (reigned 1632–67) enacted major changes when he expelled the remaining foreign Jesuits. He restored Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity after the previous king had converted to Catholicism, and, in 1636, established a permanent royal capital at Gondär to replace the prior traveling court.

Fasilädäs and subsequent Gondärine rulers turned their attention to relationships with neighbors along the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. These kings became major patrons of architecture, icons, illuminated manuscripts, processional crosses, and other objects, which allowed artists to develop new styles and techniques.

Many of the painted works exhibit one of two distinctive styles, one that recalled earlier artworks with brightly colored figures depicted as flat and icon-like (First Gondärine), and one where more naturalistic figures interact with each other in images that depict various stories (Second Gondärine).

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.153, ET.119, ET.133]

LEFT TO RIGHT

Processional cross, 17th–18th century
Silver
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Virginia, gift of Robert and Nancy Nooter, 2012.288

Artist in Gondär, Ethiopia
Processional cross, 1730–55
Brass and gilt
Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University, IESMus4193

Processional cross, 18th century
Brass
PEM, gift of Elizabeth C. Langmuir, 1988, E67931

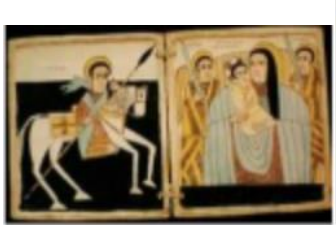
The processional crosses produced in Gondär in the 18th century are distinctive from earlier crosses due to their flared arms and incised figural decoration. Some include inscriptions that identify the patron who commissioned them. For example, the cross at right displays a small donor figure, and the one at center displays an image of Empress Məntəwwab of Ethiopia (reigned 1723–30) lying at Mary's feet. The cross on the left is an unusual silver example likely made for an important patron.

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.061]

Last Supper, 18th century
Tempera on cotton or linen, mounted on panel
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Virginia, Robert and Nancy Nooter Collection, Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund, 2012.304

This fragment of a wall painting depicts the canonical scene of the Last Supper with Christ and his apostles crowded together around a table for a communal meal. This scene leads to the final period before Jesus's death. Ethiopian painters of this time often depicted biblical figures and Christian saints with darker complexions, mirroring the African culture in which the painting was made.

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.122, ET.311]




TOP
Two-panel icon with Saint George (left) and the Virgin Mary and Christ child (right), 17th century
Tempera on gesso-primed wood
Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University, IESMus3893

BOTTOM
Three-panel icon with Virgin Mary and Christ child flanked by archangels above youthful Christ teaching (center) and scenes from the life of Christ and equestrian saints (left and right), early 16th century
Glue tempera on panel

These objects display two distinctive styles of painting developed by Gondärine court artists during the dynasty (1630s–1760s). In the earlier style, referred to as First Gondärine (in use from the mid-17th century through the early 18th), artists modeled faces with flat areas of color in different shades. In illuminated manuscripts, the artists arranged the figures on the page with the bare parchment providing the backdrop. In the later style, called Second Gondärine (from the late 17th through the 18th century), figures are smoothly modeled and shaded, and biblical and saintly figures have darker complexions. Wide horizontal bands of bright colors, typically red, yellow, and green, fill the background of these scenes, providing a dramatic backdrop for the narratives.

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.131]

Night-Heron Master (Ground Hornbill Master)
Active late 17th century, Ethiopia

Basəlyos, scribe
Active late 17th century, Ethiopia

Gospel book, late 17th century
Pigments on vellum
Private collection

Outside Gondär, in the regions of Šäwa (just north of present-day Addis Abäba) and Lasta (the region surrounding Lalibäla) artists developed modes of painting that differed in figural styles and palette to the court styles, especially in illuminated manuscripts.

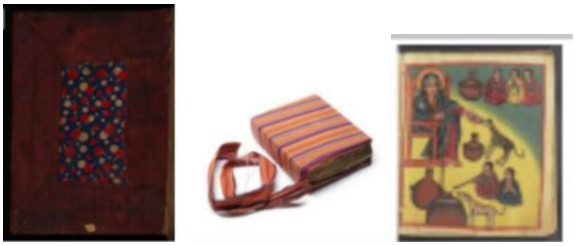
An artist active at the time is referred to as the Night-Heron Master because of his depiction of the native Ethiopian bird in one of the manuscripts he illustrated. His distinctive style features figures composed of geometric forms, colored only in shades of brown and black, creating arresting compositions and decorative patterns.

Artists from Šäwa used similar palette to the Night-Heron Master's, and they experimented with the possibilities of the parchment medium. The accordion-fold manuscript produced there is approximately double the height of a typical chained manuscript, with panels of similar width, but it mirrors a sənsul in its construction and decoration with a series of holy figures arranged in rows.

[OBJECT LABEL]
[ET.309]

Hand cross, 17th–18th century
Wood
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Richard Hubbard Howland, 1998, 61.342

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.314, , ET.310, ET.161]



LEFT

Prayer book, 19th or 20th century
Ink and paint on parchment, wood board, blind-tooled leather, and textile lining
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Dr. Giraud and Carolyn Foster, 2021, W.956, inside cover

CENTER

Zämänfäs Qəddus, scribe
Active in the late 17th century, Gondär, Ethiopia
Homiliary, late 17th century
Ink and paint on parchment, wood board, blind-tooled leather, and textile chemise
The Walters Art Museum, museum purchase with funds provided by the W. Alton Jones Foundation Acquisition Fund, 1996, W.835, fols. 10v-11r

This manuscript contains a homiliary, or book of sermons read by a priest, as well as accounts of the miracles of the Archangel Michael, whom Christians venerate as a guardian and protector from evil. In the miracle depicted on the left page of this manuscript, Saint Michael rescues the faithful from the flames of hell, and at right those whom he saves gather in the garden of Paradise.

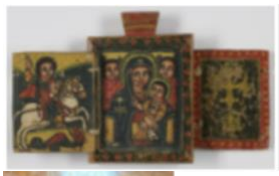
This manuscript work, with a wrapping made from a striped textile, likely of Indian origin, encapsulates just how tightly intertwined Ethiopia's and India's respective cultural products were by the 17th century. Patterns from similar textiles appear in painted images of biblical and saintly figures.

RIGHT

Wəddase Maryam (Praise of Virgin Mary), early to mid-18th century
Parchment and wood board, stitched with open spine

Princeton University Library, New Jersey, Special Collections, Robert Garrett Collection of Ethiopic Manuscripts (C0744.03), No. 65, fols. 98v–99r

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.313, ET.312, ET.243, ET.120, ET.233,]





LEFT TO RIGHT

Double-sided two-paneled pendant icon with Virgin Mary and Christ child flanked by archangels (front center) and Saint George (front left), Kʷərʿatä rəʾəsu (back center) and Saint Täkla Haymanot and donor (back left), late 18th century
Glue tempera on panel

Artist in Gondär, Ethiopia
Sənsul, late 17th century
Ink and paint on parchment and hide

The Walters Art Museum, museum purchase with funds provided by the W. Alton Jones Foundation Acquisition Fund, 1996, 36.5, 36.6, and 36.10

Artist in Gondär, Ethiopia
Three-panel icon with the Virgin Mary and Christ child flanked by archangels (center), the Kʷərʿatä rəʾəsu and Saint George (left), Saint Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus and Abba Arsanyos (right), late 17th–early 18th century
Tempera on gesso-primed wood, frame, leather, and bamboo case
Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University, IESMus3492

Prayer book and satchel, mid-20th century
Ink and paint on parchment, wood boards, and leather satchel
The Walters Art Museum, museum purchase, 1976, W.784 and W.784.REL.1

[CONSERVATION STORIES PANEL]

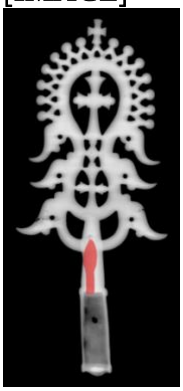
Conservation Stories

Use and Repair

Worshippers value crosses as symbolic and functional objects in liturgical ceremonies. Ethiopians have held smaller iron crosses in hand while mounting others on tall wood staffs. In processions, they sway back and forth with long fabric dressings hanging down from the lower loops.

Conservation analysis sometimes reveals evidence of repair. For example, the oldest cross on view has an iron pin cast into the shaft. It was likely inserted as a reinforcement for a vulnerable area. The original socket was damaged at some point and replaced with another socket of a different metal alloy and riveted in place. Gouges around these rivets indicate that the socket was repaired again later, suggesting that Ethiopians used and revered these crosses over long periods.

[IMAGE]



Color

Pigment analysis provides insight into the panel painting process. Ethiopian artists first sketched designs with a thin paint brushed over a white preparation layer. Often extensive, these underdrawings defined areas of color and could contribute to the overall modeling of areas.

Generally, the paint or reinforced black outlines after painting covered these sketches, but sometimes you can see the lines in areas of thinner paint or paint loss. Infrared reflectance imaging can reveal underdrawing and artists' changes, called pentimenti.

The paint is made by mixing glue with a limited range of pigments: most often vermilion, indigo blue dye, white lead, carbon black, and orpiment yellow. Gold sources existed in Ethiopia, but artists chose to use the orpiment paint, known as "king's yellow," instead of gold for bright yellow haloes, robes, and frames on icons.

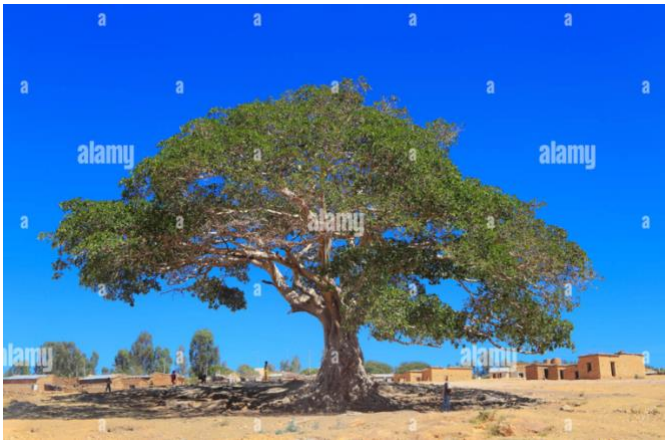
[IMAGES]

Wood

Conservation research for panel paintings looks at the pigments and the wood used for the support. Wood identification is a common type of analysis used to understand the type of wood the artist used and its geographic origins. However, conservators have rarely analyzed Ethiopian panels. The Walters Art Museum conservation team took very small samples of paintings to see what types of wood were used for the painting supports.

Results confirmed that artists frequently employed the native tree *Cordia africana* (*wanza*) in the 15th century, as well as *Canarium schweinfurthii*, also known as African elemi or African olive. After 1600, makers used a greater variety of woods harvested from trees that grow in the Ethiopian Christian highlands, including fig, thorn, olive, and date.

[IMAGE]



Indigo

Indigo is a blue-black colorant that is obtained from the leaves of the plant *Indigofera tinctoria*. Ethiopians likely imported indigo from India and artists used it as a pigment for painting icons and manuscripts and for sketching designs. Until the 18th century, indigo was the only blue-hued pigment found in Ethiopian manuscripts.

Ethiopian artists combined indigo with a bright yellow mineral pigment called orpiment, to produce a green paint that some refer to as vergaut. Scribes painted many passages with this green mixture. Do you see other instances in the manuscripts in the exhibition where the artist chose to use indigo or mixed green?

[IMAGES]

Parchment

Since at least the 6th century continuing to the present day, Ethiopians used parchment, a strong and flexible material made from the skins of domesticated animals like goats and sheep for manuscripts. Scribes soak skins for several days in water and attach them to rectangular wood frames. They scrape the skin clean using special knives with sharp, rounded blades. After the skins dry taut on the frames, they scrape both sides of the material again with smaller knives until the parchment is a creamy off-white color. Finally, they smooth the surfaces with abrasive materials like pumice stone.

The Walters Art Museum conservation team was interested in identifying the species of animals used in several of the historic manuscripts in this exhibition. An analysis by a scientist at the University of Cambridge, United Kingdom, demonstrated that scribes wrote most of the manuscripts on goatskin, while a few were on sheepskin. One luxury manuscript, probably commissioned for a church, was made of high-quality calfskin.

[IMAGE]

[SUBSECTION: Conquest and Failed Colonization]

[SUBSECTION PANEL]

Conquest and Failed Colonization

In the 19th and 20th centuries, certain European nations tried to invade and control Ethiopia for their own gain. The Italian government sought to overtake Ethiopia twice. In the First Italo-Ethiopian War from 1895 to 1896, Emperor Mənilək II and his troops defeated the Italians at ʿAdwa. The Second Italo-Ethiopian War (or Italian Invasion, as it was known in Ethiopia) resulted in Italy's occupation and attempted annexation of Ethiopia from 1935 to 1941. Emperor Haile Selassie's return to Addis Abäba from exile in 1941 resulted in the defeat of the Italians. As the only African country that was never colonized, Ethiopia's historical independence is still a point of pride not just for Ethiopians but also for many others across Africa and the diaspora.

[MURAL CREDIT LINE CAPTION]

His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie I, Addis Abäba, Ethiopia, 1958. Photo by Arnold Newman Properties/Getty Images. © Arnold Newman

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.315]

Royal cloak owned by Emperor Haile Selassie, early 20th century
Cotton velveteen, crepe, gold thread, sequins, and beads
The Walters Art Museum, gift of Mary R. Gammon, 2003.49

Emperor Haile Selassie (1892–1975) promoted his connection with the historic Solomonic dynasty of Ethiopian emperors, which claimed descent from King Solomon of Israel (about 970–931 BCE), while advancing Ethiopia on the world stage in the era of modern global diplomacy. The emperor owned this luxurious knee-length cloak adorned with gold embroidery and sequins in the 1940s. It reflects and perpetuates the kingly regalia worn by his predecessors in the Solomonic line, but the designer updated the style for his role on the 20th-century political stage.

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.134]

Battle of ʿAdwa, about 1968
Oil on canvas
Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of African Art, Washington, DC, gift of Joseph and Patricia Brumit, 2004-7-60

The Battle of ʿAdwa took place between Ethiopian forces under Emperor Mənilək II—seen here on horseback in the upper left—and the invading Italian army in March 1896. This painting depicts the Ethiopians head on, while the Italians appear in profile, following a convention borrowed from Ethiopian church paintings delineating good versus evil figures. Helping the Ethiopian troops at the center of the battle is Saint George, patron saint of Ethiopia, enclosed in a striped halo composed of the Ethiopian flag's colors.

—Tsedaye Makonnen, multidisciplinary artist, curator, researcher, cultural producer, and daughter of Ethiopian refugees

[GROUP OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.078, ET.080]


Homiliary to honor the monthly feast of Saint Michael, 1930–74
Ink and paint on parchment
The Catholic University of America, Washington, DC, Institute of Christian Oriental Research Library, Weiner Codex 365

Tä'ammərä Iyäsus (Miracles of Jesus), 19th century
Tempera and ink on parchment
The Catholic University of America, Washington, DC, Institute of Christian Oriental Research Library, Weiner Codex 357

This manuscript, likely dating to the 19th century, demonstrates the ongoing tradition of Christian manuscript illumination in Ethiopia. The eight scenes from Christ's life shown here may be later 20th-century additions to the manuscript. Their serial arrangement in squares also reflects compositions by Ethiopian illuminators and painters dating back to the 15th century.

[Interactive: Berbere]

[SIGN]

Take a card and scratch the surface to experience the scent of berbere. This spice mixture could have been stored in baskets like those on display. A traditional blend includes many spices, including chili peppers, coriander, garlic, ginger, and fenugreek. What herbs and spices do you recognize?

Olfactory interactives produced courtesy of the Institute for Digital Archaeology.

[INTERACTIVE: Manuscript]

[SIGN]

Take a card and scratch the surface to experience the smell of a manuscript, a hand-written book. Ethiopians used traditional Ethiopian Orthodox manuscripts inside churches, and the scent of the space infused them.

Olfactory interactives produced courtesy of the Institute for Digital Archaeology.

[Interactive: Frankincense]

[SIGN]

Take a card and scratch the surface to experience the scent of incense burners. Frankincense, an aromatic resin from the Boswellia tree, is used to create the most common form of incense burned in Ethiopian Orthodox churches.

Olfactory interactives produced courtesy of the Institute for Digital Archaeology.

[SECTION: GLOBAL ETHIOPIA]

[SECTION PANEL]

Global Ethiopia

In the 20th and 21st centuries, the impact of Ethiopian art and culture has continued to radiate outward beyond its borders as more contemporary Ethiopian artists worked abroad and Ethiopian people migrated to avoid political and economic hardship. The country's global reach also increased in the political sphere due to diplomatic relations and Pan-Africanism, forwarded especially by Emperor Haile Selassie, and the Rastafari movement in the Western Hemisphere, inspired by the emperor's political approach and Ethiopia's long history and resistance to colonization.

The tradition of art produced for the Ethiopian Orthodox Church continues to thrive. Painters receive major commissions for church wall paintings in the society and in Ethiopian diasporic communities abroad, scribes and illuminators produce new manuscripts to serve church ceremonies and feast days, and new forms of carved wood icons are developed. Contemporary artists also draw upon historic artworks, themes, and motifs for their work, which is sold globally and collected worldwide.

With Ethiopia as the fulcrum around which the interactions in the broader region turned, we can better grasp the interconnectedness of people in the ancient and medieval periods, which provided the foundation for cultural and artistic interchange today.

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.339]

Julie Mehretu
Born 1970, Ethiopia
Works in New York
Six Bardos: Luminous Appearance, 2018
Aquatint
Collection of The 'Quin House, Boston

In this work, layers of drawn and air-sprayed lines emerge from gestures of urban scrawl and body parts in varying broad and fluid marks. Shadowy white lines converge like ghosts in the background, giving this print a predominantly painterly presence—a hallmark of Julie Mehretu's mark-making practice.

This print's title *Six Bardos: Luminous Appearance* suggests the transitional states of life, death, and rebirth in the Buddhist tradition. Seen here among Ethiopian prayer books, wearable scrolls, pendant crosses, and Talismanic drawings, this print makes connections to how Ethiopian artists past and present have cultivated the divine through sacred and personal objects, helping us consider the liminal spaces between lived experiences and spirituality.

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.342]

Aïda Muluneh
Born 1974, Ethiopia
Works in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire
Tizita/Nostalgia, printed 2023
From the series *The World is 9*, 2016
Inkjet print
PEM, museum purchase, by exchange, 2023.33.3

The Amharic word “tizita” means nostalgia. It’s our national sport in a sense to be nostalgic and based on the collection it all comes back to memory and the past. The archive image is the grandmother of my good friend Japi Yilma. Her name being Emahoye Kassaye Yelemtu. She was the mother of her mom, who was also married to the first ambassador of Ethiopia, Kantiba Gebru Desta.

—Aïda Muluneh, artist

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.344]

Aïda Muluneh
Born 1974, Ethiopia
Works in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire
Postcards from Asmara, printed 2023
From the series *The World is 9*, 2016
Inkjet print
PEM, museum purchase, by exchange, 2023.33.1

Before the separation of Eritrea from Ethiopia . . . my grandfather was in the air force and based in Asmara. It has been the place that I have always wanted to visit simply from the stories of my grandmother and also the fact that I find it unfortunate that we have been separated from a nation and a people that are also part of all of us. I made this piece, which combines an archive postcard from Eritrea of a woman from an [unknown] ethnic group . . . . [I] liked the boldness of her clothing and the fact that what she wore was something, both traditional and contemporary. This is in a sense my postcard that I am sending back to Asmara, a place that I hope one day we can reconcile our differences, not to be one nation but to move forward into the future together. [The divide between] families who are from Eritrea while the other is from Ethiopia . . . has affected more than the politics of both of our nations, to which point that we can't visit a place that we share so much history, culture, and language.

—Aïda Muluneh, artist

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.229]

Alexander “Skunder” Boghossian
1937–2003, Ethiopia
The End of the Beginning, 1972–73
Oil on canvas
Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of African Art, Washington, DC, museum purchase, 91-18-2

The painter Alexander “Skunder” Boghossian was born in Addis Abäba, the son of an Armenian father and an Ethiopian mother. In 1970, he emigrated to Washington, DC, where he taught and influenced generations of Black artists at Howard University from 1972 to 2001. *The End of the Beginning* depicts the key Ethiopian historical and cultural sites of Aksum and Lalibäla in flames, in a prefiguration of the Ethiopian Revolution of 1974. This work represents the political struggles of the 1970s that prompted the Ethiopian diaspora, globally and to the Baltimore and Washington, DC, area.

[OBJECT LABEL WITH GUEST CURATOR ANNOTATION]
[ET.033]

Faith Ringgold
Born 1930, United States
Lucy: The 3.5 Million Year Old Lady, 1977
Mixed media on wood and fabric
Minneapolis Institute of Art, The William Hood Dunwoody Fund, 2020.12

Much history of humankind can be traced to Ethiopia. Excavations in Ethiopia over the past 50 years have yielded multiple finds of some of the oldest human ancestors (hominids). The most famous of these skeletal remains is Dinkinesh ("you are marvelous" in Amharic), also known as Lucy. Found in Hadar, Ethiopia, Dinkinesh belongs to the species *Australopithecus afarensis* and the remains are now housed in the National Museum of Ethiopia in Addis Abäba.

Faith Ringgold is an American painter, printmaker, and sculptor known for her narrative quilts. The artist honors Dinkinesh in this mixed-media work, which features a miniature figure of her in an open casket set on a platform embellished with textiles that the artist collected in Africa, in addition to items acquired from her mother. Ringgold connects the beginnings of humankind in Africa, and specifically Ethiopia, with her own lived experience as an African American artist living and working in the US.

—Tsedaye Makonnen, multidisciplinary artist, curator, researcher, cultural producer, and daughter of Ethiopian refugees

[VISITOR INFORMATION PANEL]

Know before You Explore
This multimedia and video installation features flashing lights. For individuals who may be affected by light, please continue past the work to the next section.

[ICON]

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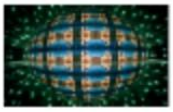
[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.168]



Theo Eshetu
Born 1958, Ethiopia
Brave New World II, 1999
Multimedia and video installation, duration: 35 minutes, 30 seconds
Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of African Art, Washington, DC, museum purchase, 2008-7-1

This installation addresses diasporic identity in the era of globalization, speaking specifically to the experiences of Africans on the continent and abroad. Eshetu touches on technology's capacity to connect disparate people and places, and the desire for a world wherein differences produced by various geographies and lived experiences creates a shared understanding.

—Tsedaye Makonnen, multidisciplinary artist, curator, researcher, cultural producer, and daughter of Ethiopian refugees

[OBJECT LABEL WITH ANNOTATION]
[ET.173]

Elias Sime
Born 1968, Ethiopia
Tightrope, 2021
Keyboards and megaphone on panel
Private collection

In *Tightrope*, Elias Sime repurposes electronic waste as a meditation on communication in the age of technology. The motif of the megaphone, an instrument used to communicate in large-scale gatherings, symbolizes a collective desire to understand or glean information and the keyboard keys evoke the aspects of technology that contribute to misinformation and misunderstanding.

—Tsedaye Makonnen, multidisciplinary artist, curator, researcher, cultural producer, and daughter of Ethiopian refugees

[EXIT EXPERIENCE]

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