

Press Release

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Welancora Gallery presents Teff Teffa



Welancora Gallery is proud to present *Teff Teffa*, a solo exhibition of new, mixed-media paintings and sculpture by Meron Engida Hawke (b. 1987). The exhibition opens on Thursday, March 30 and remains on view until May 11. The opening reception will take place on March 30 from 6:00pm to 8:00pm. This is the artist's first solo exhibition with the gallery.

Ancient Ethiopian art and material culture act as points of departure for Hawke's work, which tells the story of her country's struggles with climate change, economic disparity, civil war, and industrialization, while simultaneously shedding light on the beauty and resilience of its people, as she weaves tales of African female empowerment.

With acrylic, oil pigments and collage on canvas, Hawke creates a series of large and mid-sized tableaux reminiscent of the iconography found in 16th and 17th century Ethiopian church paintings and bibles.

Hawke's *Teff Teffa* series focuses on the devastating economic effect that climate change has on rain-fed agriculture, the production of grains indigenous to Ethiopia; and, the African female employees of the growing floriculture industry which primarily exports these goods to European countries. Teff is a grain used to make the staple bread, injera. Due to climate change, and food insecurity from ongoing conflicts in the region, teff is becoming more expensive to grow and sell.

Several of the paintings and sculpture from this series are sprinkled with small dots painted throughout to represent teff. The women in these scenes are often standing beside or mounting horses and lions, much like the depictions of saints in traditional Ethiopian church paintings, to symbolize protection, justice, and strength. Fruit baskets are placed in the foreground to reference the fertile land. In an homage to the Suri Tribe in south Ethiopia and their reverence for nature, Hawke's sculpture is adorned with teff grass and an Aksumite kingdom coin.

In her newest series *Ashenda Girls*, Hawke draws inspiration from the northern Ethiopian festival that marks the arrival of the Ashende holiday. This annual festival honors and empowers Ethiopian women, encouraging joyful and communal expression. The artist has stated that these women "hold in more pain than they let out and hold each other, demonstrating resilience after years of violence and weaponized starvation." The name "Ashenda" comes from tall teff grass that the women weave into skirts to wear during the festival.

In an ode to traditional Ethiopian hand weaving, Hawke weaves yarn into her work creating ancient Ethiopian symbols as commentary on the mass manufacturing of clothing out of the region. The lambs, doves, rainbows, and rich colors found across her mixed media works remind the viewer of the notions of hope, strength, peace, and resilience found amongst Ethiopian women and their communities.

About the artist

Meron Engida Hawke was born in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. She completed her studies at the Abyssinia School of Fine Art and Design and Ale School of Fine Art and Design, both located in Addis Ababa. Her work has been exhibited within the United States and abroad. Hawke currently lives and works in Washington, DC.

Image: *Teff Teffa*, 2022, acrylic on canvas, 66 x 39 inches

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