

TARIKU SHIFERAW

Marking Oneself in Dark Places

September 7 - October 21, 2023

Opening Thursday, September 7, 2023, 6:00pm - 8:00pm



Tariku Shiferaw, *Dogon Sun*, 2023.

Galerie Lelong & Co., New York is pleased to announce a solo exhibition of new works in painting and installation by Tariku Shiferaw. The works on view will be from two of the artist's ongoing series, *One of These Black Boys* and *Mata Semay*, in which Shiferaw engages his practice of cultural space-making through a confrontation of exclusionary Eurocentric systems of epistemic erasure. Shiferaw's latest series, *Mata Semay*, Amharic for "night skies," proposes a new mythology that imagines how the night sky would exist if diasporic cultural contributions were considered in the global consciousness. Shiferaw's paintings reflect his ongoing commitment to process, with new works measuring over six feet and a selection of works with chiffon making their debut after years of experimentation with the

textile. This exhibition coincides with the artist's debut museum solo exhibition, *Making Space: One of These Black Boys*, at the Southampton African American Museum, New York.

The smaller gallery space will be transformed into a continuous night sky painted on panels of unstretched canvas with 24 ceramic sculptures in the center. An audio component emerges out of these sculptures: a sonic constellation composed of sounds representative of the African diaspora. This installation, *A Sign in Space* (2023), is part of the *Mata Semay* series and is a continuation of the artist's exploration of large-scale installation following *A Strange Place to Cast Our Dreams* (2022), which premiered at Smack Mellon, Brooklyn, New York last summer. Shiferaw's latest installation takes its title from Italo Calvino's *Cosmicomics* volume, a collection of linked short narratives of scientific theories on the inception and evolution of the universe. The story *A Sign in Space* chronicles the efforts of a primordial being to mark a spot in the vast expanse of the universe with a sign that denotes his presence.

In the main gallery, the works on view take on a dark-toned palette, with backgrounds of expressively painted deep blues and purples as a core component of their composition. In paintings from the *Mata Semay* series, these emotive backgrounds are punctuated by abstracted constellations and represent imagined versions of the night sky, evoking the mystical essence of the cosmos. In *The Dreaming* (2022), a large-scale painting from the series, Shiferaw juxtaposes this dream-like background with a repetitive grid pattern to address the futile concept of owning or controlling space.

In a selection of works from the *One of These Black Boys* series, a body of work addressing issues of systemic erasure, Shiferaw covers the canvas with mixed media including acrylic and iridescent film before shrouding them with layers of poly-chiffon. The layers of fabric fluctuate in opacity as the angle from which the work is viewed changes, centering the engagement of the viewer and prompting an inquiry into who is granted visibility in cultural spaces. As with all of the paintings in the *One of These*

Black Boys series, the works are titled after songs from musical genres by artists of the African diaspora such as Hip-Hop, R&B, Reggae, Afrobeats, Blues, and Jazz, infusing the works with the cultural histories that these references carry.

Works by Shiferaw will on view in the travelling exhibition *The Culture: Hip Hop and Contemporary Art in the 21st Century* at the Saint Louis Art Museum, Missouri from August 19, 2023 – January 1, 2024; in the exhibition *States of Becoming*, organized by Independent Curators International and on view at the Center for Art, Design, and Visual Culture, University of Maryland, Baltimore County from September 14 – December 9, 2023; and in the exhibition *Spectrum: On Color & Contemporary Art* on view at the Museum of the African Diaspora (MoAD), San Francisco, California from September 27, 2023 – March 3, 2024.

About the Artist

Tariku Shiferaw is known for his practice of mark-making that explores the metaphysical ideas of painting and societal structures. This formal language of geometric abstraction is executed through densely layering material to create “marks,” gestures that interrogate space-making and reference the hierarchy of systems. As the artist explains, “A mark, as physical and present as cave-markings... reveals the thinker behind the gesture—an evidence of prior markings of ideas and self onto the space.”

Apart from paint on canvases, Shiferaw also incorporates ready-made objects and materials in his installations, often using transparent and colored mylar, and subverting their utilitarian characteristics in assembly or hanging to create a body of evocative works that question perception and space. Born in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, growing up in Los Angeles, and currently based in New York City, Shiferaw finds inspiration from the diverse cultures in his environments, particularly in the areas of music and language. Shiferaw’s ongoing series of paintings *One of These Black Boys* references musical genres that have originated in Black communities—Hip-hop, R&B, Reggae, Afrobeats, Blues, and Jazz—a context that charges the works with musical references, identities, and cultural histories.

Shiferaw’s work may be understood in the framework of midcentury abstraction, but the artist also infuses this formal vocabulary with critical observations from popular culture.

Museum exhibitions that have presented works by Tariku Shiferaw include *The Culture: Hip Hop and Contemporary Art in the 21st Century* at the Baltimore Museum of Art, Maryland (2023); *You’d Think By Now* at Smack Mellon, Brooklyn, New York (2022); *Geometries* at Sugar Hill Children’s Museum of Art & Storytelling, New York (2022); *Men of Change*, organized by The Smithsonian Institution, and held at the California African American Museum (CAAM), Los Angeles (2021); *Unbound* at the Zuckerman Museum of Art (ZMA), Kennesaw, Georgia (2020); *What’s Love Got to Do with It?* at The Drawing Center, New York, New York (2019); *A Poet*hical Wager* at the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland, Ohio (2017-18); and the 2017 Whitney Biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Shiferaw has participated in the Independent Study Program at the Whitney Museum of American Art (Studio), in Open Sessions at The Drawing Center (2018-2020), and has been an artist-in-residence at the LES Studio Program in New York City, at the World Trade Center through Silver Art Projects, and at ARCAthens, Greece.

Shiferaw was born in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in 1983, raised in Los Angeles, California, and now lives and works in New York City.

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HIGHLIGHTS



Tariku Shiferaw
The Dreaming, 2022
Acrylic and plastic on canvas
72 x 60 in (182.9 x 152.4 cm)



Tariku Shiferaw
Alkebulan, 2023
Acrylic on canvas
96 x 96 in (243.8 x 243.8 cm)



Tariku Shiferaw
Superstar (Ms. Lauryn Hill), 2023
Acrylic, poly-chiffon (& other silk materials),
on iridescent film and canvas
60 x 48 in (152.4 x 121.9 cm)



Tariku Shiferaw
Quiet As It's Kept (Max Roach), 2023
Acrylic on canvas
72 x 60 in (182.9 x 152.4 cm)