

TARIKU SHIFERAW

It's a love thang, it's a joy thang

April 1 - May 15, 2021

Opening Thursday, April 1, 2021, 10:00am - 6:00pm



Tariku Shiferaw, *Cranes in the Sky*
(*Solange*), 2020

Galerie Lelong & Co., New York, is pleased to present *It's a love thang, it's a joy thang*, our first solo exhibition with Tariku Shiferaw. Born in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and currently based in New York City, Shiferaw's practice of mark-making references the historicity of abstract painting and its hierarchical structures embedded in scholarship. *It's a love thang* draws inspiration from the ongoing movement of Black joy that has increasingly gained momentum among creatives as a source of community-building and healing.

The exhibition will present new works to the public from Shiferaw's ongoing series of paintings *One of These Black Boys*, which the artist began working on a larger scale in the past year. Titled after songs from musical genres by artists of the African diaspora such as Hip-hop, R&B, Reggae, Afrobeats, Blues, and Jazz, the paintings reiterate the artists' stage names and song titles. Both stretched on canvas and draped from the wall, the paintings intentionally hold space for the Black bodies and cultures they represent. For Shiferaw, working in abstraction entails a re-envisioning of identity and form, the gestural surface in his paintings and mark-making is his reclamation of a space that was denied to many artists.

A new site-specific installation *Jarusalem (Master KG)* (2021) embodies both the artist's lived experience of Black joy and his childhood in Los Angeles, California, creating an environment where reality and fantasy exist on the same plain. A live palm tree in the middle centers the visitor's attention, an immediate place-maker reminiscent of Shiferaw's time spent in the neighborhoods of L.A. and a nod to how palm trees are often used to demarcate spaces of relaxation. Reflective mylar sheeting and chain-link fencing covers one wall, intimating a version of the visitor's presence and body into view that is separated by the fence. On the other wall, small wooden objects are installed against a panel of pink paint; recalling the artist's early use and subversion of utilitarian shipping pallets to make art. Toi Derricotte's poem, "Joy is an act of resistance" is printed in a small font, inviting a closer look. She asks, "What does her love have to do with five hundred years of sorrow, then joy coming up like a small breath, a bubble? What does it have to do with the graveyards of the Atlantic, in her mother's heart?" Derricotte is not alone in embodying Black joy in her practice, its ethos is rooted in a blues-based tradition and has been expressed by creatives across multiple periods and media, from Zora Neale Hurston and Maya Angelou, to the musicians Shiferaw names his works after, including Solange and Kendrick Lamar.

A highlight of the exhibition, *A Boy Is A Gun (Tyler the Creator)* (2020) comprises blue paint applied directly to the gallery wall in a rectangular form, with 12 black wooden objects that echo pallets installed on the surface. Previously exhibited at the Zuckerman Museum of Art, Kennesaw, the semi-permanence of the paint in the museum and present gallery environment adds another layer to the work that speaks to its realization through another body, removed from the artist's hand.

About the Artist

Museum exhibitions that have presented works by Tariku Shiferaw include the *2017 Whitney Biennial* at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York; *A Poet*hical Wager* at the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland, Ohio; *Unbound* at the Zuckerman Museum of Art (ZMA), Kennesaw, Georgia; *Men of Change*, a traveling exhibition organized by The Smithsonian Institution, and currently on view at the Anacostia Community Museum, Washington, DC and California African American Museum, Los Angeles; and *What's Love Got to Do with It?* at The Drawing Center, New York, 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, and he was artist-in-residence at the LES Studio Program in New York City. Shiferaw is currently an artist-in-residence at the World Trade Center through Silver Art Projects.

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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