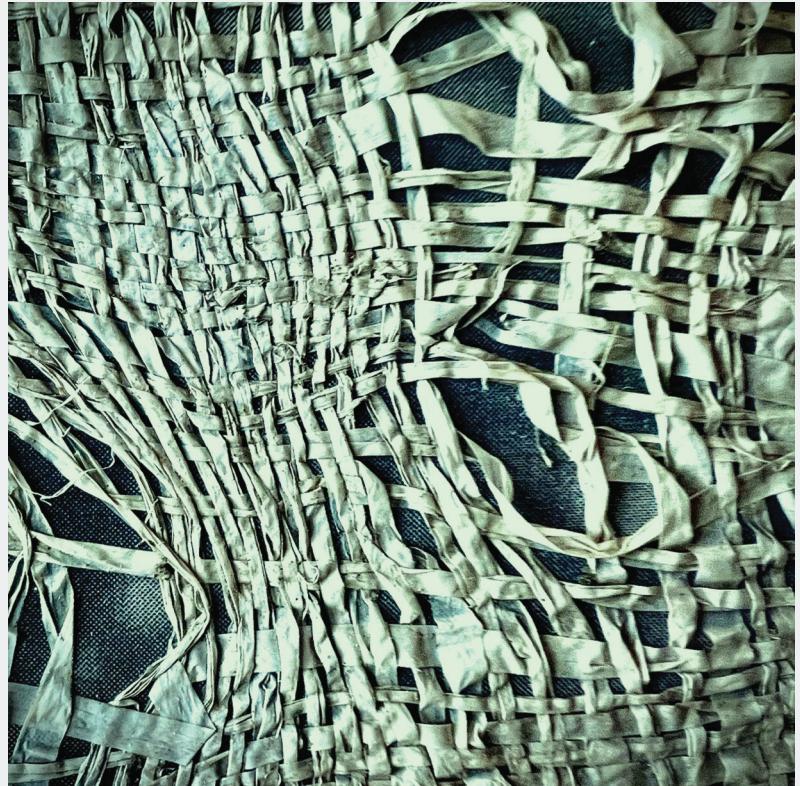


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## The Paradox

Belly [በሮ-Ho'od-Amharic] : front part[of the body] holding food and drink: container. Concurrent to a vessel.  
Belly: thought, demeanor (Desta Teklewold: Amharic Dictionary: 1970E.C, PP 403)

After shifting from working on canvas, the material that primarily grabbed my attention and the one I worked a lot with is corrugated iron. The corrugated iron, both new and old, enabled me to question the stories of the individual, the neighborhood and the city that are simply demolished and dismantled. Through the process, I observed these demolished houses and neighborhoods being covered by the plastic fabric, locally named MADABERIYA, that is predominantly used as a sack for holding grains and flour. This has laid the foundation for the shift in subject matter apparent in my recent body of works over the past few years.

Beyond thinking its functional use as a cover or fence; the versatility and spectrum of the material MADABERIYA catered and forced me to examine the range of national and continental issues that persisted from our past to our future. I found the MADABERIYA conveying burning issues that usually remain undiscussed. This line of thought led me to discover other similar materials used to packaging mass produced and consumable goods. Packaging cans, textiles, images, even quotes and proverbs posted in shops, taxis and in different places, images...etc. are abundant in our day-to-day activities as well as in our sacred places. Some of these materials especially the MADABERIYA and the packaging cans are even used as one of our units of measurement. The MADABERIYA triggered all of these insights and escorted me to revisit our history and identity.

Ethiopian societies miraculously battled for their identity and effected a symbolic monumental history for oppressed people. Yet, our yearly budget is determined based on aid funds. Following the funds, we are forced to comply to the ideology behind the politics of aid. Such a genealogy reveals the riddle that we are yet unable to resolve. This exhibition deals with aspects related to being able or unable to feed oneself typified by a belly or ቦር-Ho'od [in Amharic] whose back entails a shadow encompassing wide-ranging paradoxes. Using this show as a starting point, it's my aim to recurrently and exhaustively work on the subject using artistic research in as much depth as possible.

The belly or ቤድድ as in the above Desta Teklewold's definition, entangles the consumption of food with digesting ideas and related to its churning character. Ethiopian literary giant, Sebat GebreEzziabher speaks about belly or ቤድድ, its bottomless pit, as an insatiable desire akin to devilish cravings through his character who lost five of his family members to hunger in the renowned novella Amist Sisid Sebat (Five Six Seven አምስት ሰሳብ የሰባት) saving:

"....Five Six Seven! Satan is [our] belly. An astounding void is the belly, it's the one that can never be filled up. Satan is the belly. Satan allied with the serpent, misled Eve; blended with the fruit, entered Eve's stomach. Fused in her stomach, [the consequence] ensued to her offspring. [if] Satan is thrown to hell, it means it's tossed to the belly. Then what? Then, it reigns over our lives, he makes us prostrate, staying within that darkness [of the belly]"

I also took a glimpse of Ethiopian proverbs related to the subject. The extent and depth of our proverbs related to belly or በየጋ doesn't allow me to ignore the subject as the saying goes «በየጋ ደጥቶ» HOD YIFJEW' which translates "let the belly deal with it [the issue you grapple with]" Rather, it made me think of questions. How deep the belly knows its back, the structure that holds it upright? Beyond the means on how we contain in feeding ourselves, why can't we think of the burdens behind the inability to feed ourselves? Is it because of the degree of our layered problems? Is it because of being insatiable towards the questions of our belly or is it because of our appeal to only be concerned about filling our belly? I'm forced to question what really enforced us to be highly associated with hunger, poverty and as aid liquidators despite all these associations could not be more than anecdotes in some chapters of our titanic history. Because of all these, my body of works in this exhibition do mostly focus on identity and narratives of identity.

Identity is woven by narratives. Identity is not only constructed by narratives that we produce about ourselves. It is also based on the narratives that others devise about us. The images that recorded our history are full of "Paradoxes" which repeatedly evoke and could not seemingly reconcile with the images created by these two narratives. Even if we do not deny the fact that all these are part of our history; what have we done to expunge these narratives and images? Amid the viciously recurring and paradoxical images of identity; to try to look for a possible cure that serves the present day, the future and the generation to come is all what I and this exhibition crave for.

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ՄՀԱՅԻ ԹՎԱՅԻ ՄՊԵ... (ՔՆԴՔ ԴԻԼԱՅԱԼԻ ։ 1970։ ՂԱ 403)