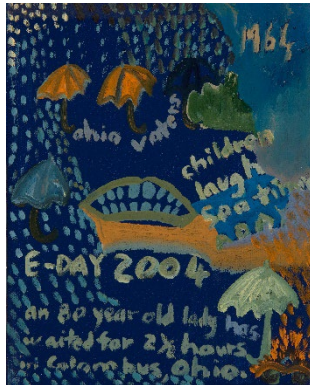


Independent New York

Ficre Ghebreyesus: Help is on the way!

May 9 - 12, 2024



Ficre Ghebreyesus, *Ohio Voters (Election Day)*, c. 2004.

Galerie Lelong & Co., New York is pleased to participate in the 2024 edition of Independent New York with a solo presentation by Ficre Ghebreyesus featuring works created in 2004 in anticipation of and response to that year's presidential election in the United States, as well as a selection of works that engage concurrent global headlines. Mirroring the news media that inspired them, these paintings are notable for their prominent incorporation of text. This presentation marks the public debut of most of the works on view, twenty years after their creation and in the midst of another election cycle in the U.S. A selection of works prominently feature numbers that invoke anxious anticipation and the countdown to Election Day. Recurring depictions of open mouths convey frenetic chatter, while references to children's laughter seem to serve as a reminder that electoral decisions will craft the world for future generations. The motifs that emerge in this body of work convey a tense yet hopeful vision of democracy that

remains poignant two decades later.

Works on view prompt an inquiry into the circulation of news, referencing methods of disseminating information. In one such work, *September 1, 1939* (2001), Ghebreyesus renders an excerpt from W.H. Auden's 1939 poem of the same name in black block letters. Set against a white and gray background, the painting's composition is reminiscent of newsprint. Written as a response to the German invasion of Poland and the start of World War II, Auden's poem experienced a resurgence in popularity following the September 11 attacks, beginning with a reading of the poem on National Public Radio in the subsequent days. Ghebreyesus often listened to the radio in his studio, painting to the sound of both the news and music—references to which appear throughout the works on view. In a painting entitled *48 h* (c. 2004), the number forty-eight appears on a television screen, with the number forty-one repeating across the top of the canvas as a ticker tape would. Taking on a largely monochromatic palette of shades of blue, Ghebreyesus uses color-blocking to create portals in the arches of abstracted letter-Hs. These window-like passages are a recurring motif in Ghebreyesus's oeuvre, serving as reminders of the movement in the artist's life caused by war and displacement.

Ghebreyesus's distinct experience as a person from an international background living in the United States influenced his processing of current events, and throughout the works on view the artist lends weight to international news. In *Less Than 17 Hours (Election Day)* (c. 2004), an accumulation of state's names surrounds one of John Kerry's campaign slogans, "Help is on the way!". At the bottom of the composition is a reminder of the civilian death toll in Iraq, as reported in October of 2004; the mention of the international conflict underscores Ghebreyesus's reading of U.S. election news.

Ficre Ghebreyesus was born in Asmara, Eritrea, in 1962, and died in New Haven, Connecticut, in 2012. Ghebreyesus left Eritrea during its War of Independence (1961–1991) as a teenaged refugee to Sudan, Italy, and Germany, before finally settling in the United States where he received an MFA from the Yale School of Art and was awarded the Carol Schlossberg Prize for Excellence in Painting at graduation.

Operating fluidly between abstraction and figuration, Ghebreyesus populated his works with intricate, highly personal experiences as a citizen of the world. While Ghebreyesus turned down most opportunities to show during his short lifetime, posthumous solo institutional exhibitions of his work include *Ficre Ghebreyesus: City with a River Running Through* at the Museum of the African Diaspora, San Francisco, California and *POLYCHROMASIA: Selected Paintings by Ficre Ghebreyesus* at Artspace, New Haven, Connecticut. Galerie Lelong began representing the Estate in 2019 and held the solo exhibition *Ficre Ghebreyesus: Gate to the Blue* in 2020. In 2022, Ghebreyesus's work was showcased in the 59th Venice Biennale, *The Milk of Dreams*. His work has also been exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Illinois and California African American Museum, Los Angeles, California. Works by Ghebreyesus can be found in the collections of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, California; Glenstone Museum, Potomac, Maryland; Baltimore Museum of Art, Maryland; Pérez Art Museum Miami, Florida; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, New York; Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut; New Orleans Museum of Art, Louisiana; Rollins Museum of Art, Winter Park, Florida and the Hutchins Center for African & African American Research, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

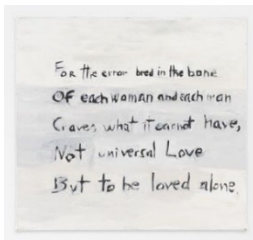
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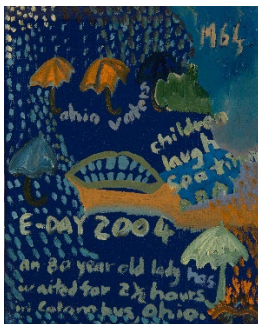
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Courtesy Galerie Lelong & Co.



Ficre Ghebreyesus
September 1, 1939, 2001
Oil on canvas
28 ¾ x 26 in (71.8 x 66 cm)



Ficre Ghebreyesus
Ohio Voters (Election Day), c. 2004
Acrylic on canvas
10 x 8 in (25.4 x 20.3 cm)



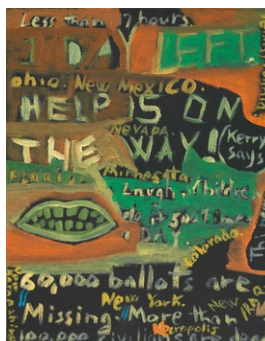
Ficre Ghebreyesus
48 h, c. 2004
Acrylic on canvas
8 x 10 in (20.3 x 25.4 cm)



Ficare Ghebreyesus

1994-2004, c. 2004-06

Acrylic, ink, and collage on canvas
6 x 8 in (15.2 x 20.3 cm)



Ficare Ghebreyesus

Less Than 17 Hours (Election Day), c. 2004

Acrylic on canvas
10 x 8 in (25.4 x 20.3 cm)