

## Ermias Ekube: *ACCRA - Memories are we are stories*

3 April - 3 May

Ed Cross

19 Garrett Street, EC1Y 0TY



Ermias Ekube, *Memories are we are stories, fishermen's routine part 3, 2024*

Ed Cross is delighted to present *ACCRA - Memories are we are stories*, a solo exhibition of works by Ermias Ekube, presented in collaboration with dot.ateliers Residency in Accra, Ghana, which will benefit from 10% of the proceeds from sales - donated jointly by the artist and gallery.

Ekube's latest body of work follows on from his previous exhibition, *Memories are we are memories* (Ed Cross, June 2024). In this group of paintings the artist revisits his relationship with memory, shifting from memory as a reflection to memory as a narrative. Against the backdrop of his residency at dot.ateliers in Accra - the artist's first visit to West Africa and his first return to the continent after nine years of exile in Sweden - Ekube retraces his own personal histories, intertwining them with the lived experiences of the local fishing community he encountered during his time in Ghana. *ACCRA - Memories are we are stories* is a multilayered meditation on identity and belonging, inviting the viewer to consider how memories are transformed by stories, and vice versa.

For Ekube, memory is not static - it is a fluid, sometimes unpredictable, part of us, constantly shaping and reshaping our identities. "Without memories, our stories don't exist - what we know about ourselves is based on our memories" says the artist. His paintings, which delicately balance the abstraction of memory with the realism of the scenes he witnessed in Accra, suggest that we are both the sum of what we remember and what we forget. Whether a contemplative oceanscape or an intimate, timeworn portrait, Ekube's series as a whole presents memory as a force deeply rooted in place and time. The fishermen's quiet rituals, the infinite ocean, horses lingering at the water's edge - each scene is deeply evocative of the artist's memory, which itself is a tool for both recording and reimagining, shaped by the shifting tides of time.

In *ACCRA - Memories are we are stories*, time acts as a unifying element between different lives, allowing the paintings to reflect the stories within the scenes they depict. The hourglass, a recurring motif throughout this series, as well as Ekube's previous *Memories are we are memories*, serves as a symbol of time and reminds us that memory is not a fixed record. In *Memories are we are stories #6*, the canvas is split - two scenes connected by an hourglass reinforces the artist's vision of memory as a process of accumulation and erosion. "I am bringing people together in time and overlapping their stories with my stories" Ekube says. The layering of figures and settings mirrors this entanglement of stories and memories, blurring the boundaries between past and present.

During his residency at dot.ateliers in Accra, Ekube found himself immersed in an environment which he found reminiscent of his childhood in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Accra became a site of memory and reconnection, a place where the artist interwove his own memories with the stories of the people he met in the local community near the residency. Ekube's painting style, which combines expressive brushwork with a subdued yet atmospheric palette, gives his compositions a dream-like quality. Realistic portraits, bisected canvases and faceless figures in the background against layers of paint echo the artist's experience of memory as something reconstructed and intimate.

The ocean is pervasive in *ACCRA - Memories are we are stories*, as either the subject of individual paintings or the backdrop to figures that rely on the ocean's subsistence for their livelihoods. Ekube was fascinated by the stories of the fishermen, learning of their abstinence from fishing in July of his residency due to traditional religious beliefs. These moments from his residency, intertwined with impressions drawn from his own past, rekindle memories of superstitions from his village in Addis. This convergence of personal history and unexpected narrative is at the heart of *ACCRA - Memories are we are stories*, where mystery lies beneath the surface. The absence of fishermen in July led Ekube to first turn his gaze to the horses that roamed the coastline. In *Memories are we are stories #7*, a horse stands among debris, embodying the local saying "what we give - we get it back" which describes how the ocean returns the waste thrown into it by washing it back upon its shores.

*ACCRA - Memories are we are stories* is a testament to Ekube's experience of memory, how it evolves and the stories it creates. In blending his own personal memories with the narratives of the local fishing community around dot.ateliers in Accra, Ekube offers paintings that feel deeply intimate yet also resonant. Ekube invites us to consider our own memories as stories that are constantly rewritten, edging forward and forever changing like ocean waves returning to the shore.

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**Ermias Ekube** (b. 1970, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia) studied at the Addis Ababa School of Fine Arts and Design, graduating in 1990. He lives and works in Kalmar, Sweden. Merging figurative and conceptual strands, Ekube's work draws on thoughts and memories to imbue stories with meaning via simple objects, signs and gestures. Recent exhibitions include *Altering Memories*, Almas Art Foundation at The Africa Centre (London, 2024); *Memories are we are memories*, Ed Cross (London, 2024); *Foreign Lands*, Ed Cross (London, 2023); *The process of changing a meaning that matters or not*, Oskarshamn Kulturhuset (Oskarshamn, 2019); *En gränslös blick*, Norrköpings Konstmuseum (Norrköpings, 2018); *African Artists for Development* (Vienna, 2017); and *Do Lives Matter?*, Malhuset (Oslo, 2016-17).

*Ermias Ekube: Memories are we are memories*, a survey of the artist's life and work was published by the Almas Art Foundation, London, in 2024.

Ekube's work can be found in a number of notable private collections internationally, including those of Farah Fonkenell, Majed Halawi and Anthony Athaide.

In 2024, Ekube completed a successful residency at dot.ateliers (Accra, Ghana). Several works from the residency were acquired by the renowned artist, collector and dot.ateliers founder, Amoako Bofo.