

AFTER THE MILLENNIUM: CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE IN ETHIOPIA

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As a follow-up the 2015 Carter Conference “Schools of Architecture Africa: Connecting Disciplines in Design and Development,” the Architecture|Africa Working Group hosted five leading Ethiopian Architects for two days of formal and informal meetings with students, faculty, and the general public. The Ethiopian guests presented their work in an exhibition “After the Millennium: Contemporary Architecture in Ethiopia” in the College of Design Construction and Planning Teaching Gallery. The exhibition, curated by David Rifkind (FIU), Dawit Benti (EiABC), and Jürgen Strohmayer (EiABC), and was held simultaneously at the Miami Center for Architecture and Design and at the Goethe Institute in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

All of the visiting architects had recent work included in the exhibit, which presented 26 projects built in Ethiopia since 2000. Representing the work of 19 individual practitioners and firms, the exhibition offered a detailed panorama of innovation in the metropolitan built environment of modern Ethiopia. The first two decades

of the century have witnessed enormous economic growth in Ethiopia, with major transportation and energy projects accompanying the rapid expansion of the country’s cities. The projects exhibited represent a broad range of clients and users, and include important works built under the patronage of the national and regional governments, foreign diplomatic missions, the African Union, universities, commercial concerns, and arts institutions.

Architects Zeleke Belay, Yoseph Bereded, Addis Mebratu, and artist, curator and author Meskerem Assegued discussed how their work is driving change in the Horn of Africa. The panel discussion “Ethiopia Now,” moderated by Architect Dawit Benti and Donna Cohen, was crowded to standing room only. Each architect discussed their training, experience, and approach to public and private space, and building philosophy. The audience appreciated the spatial and programmatic expressions of contemporary urbanism detailed in the individual presentations, and asked pointed questions about the role of architecture in the current political climate. The extreme pressure of rapid additions and subtractions to the historic fabric of Addis

Ababa was palpable.

In addition to the public presentations, the architects worked with my senior architecture undergraduate students on a comparative study of rapid urbanization in Addis Ababa and Manhattan. The study of seemingly incomparable places yielded a surprising and fruitful set of analogous physical and social situations.

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