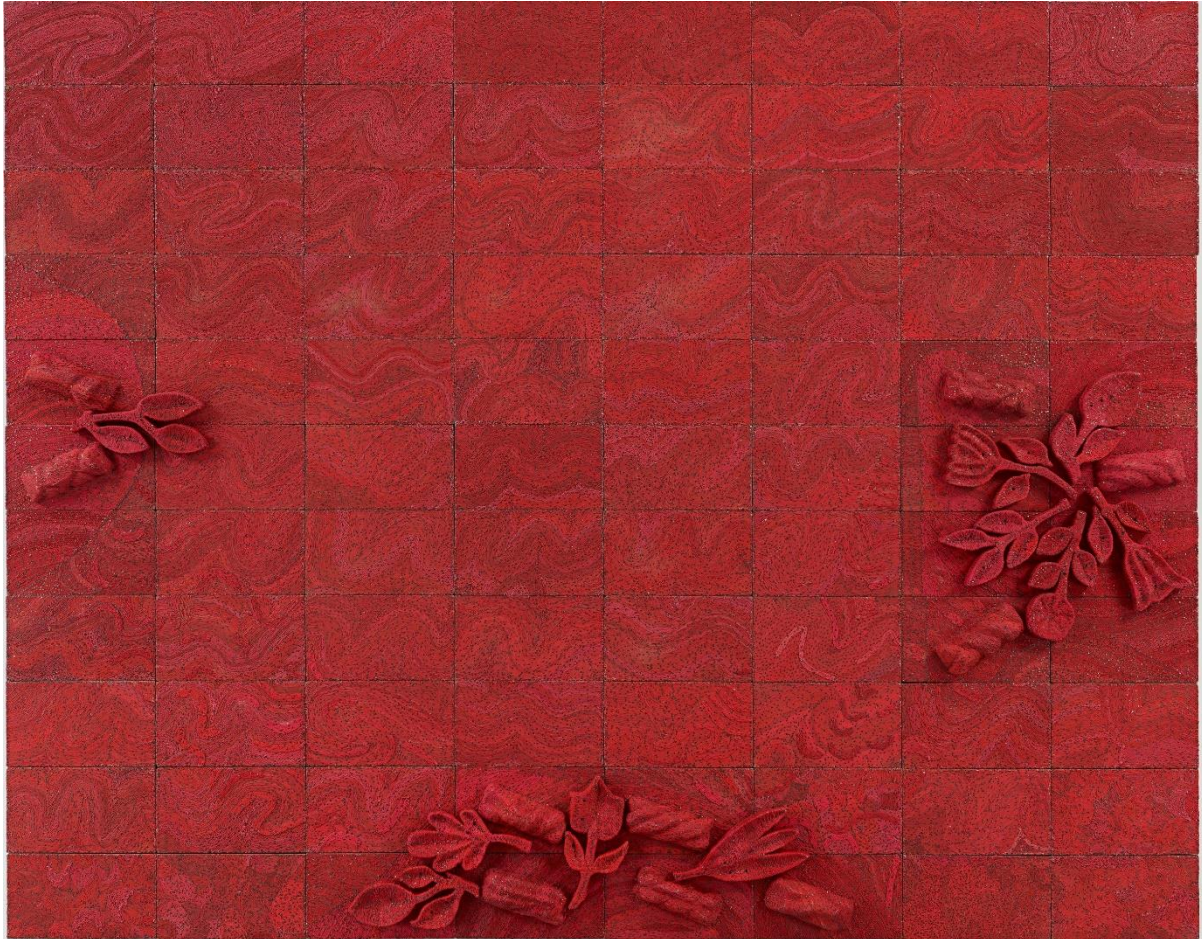


Press Release: August 2023

ELIAS SIME: EREGATA አርጋታ

21 October 2023 to 18 February 2024



Tightrope: It is Green 8, Elias Sime, 2023, electrical wires on panels.
Image © and courtesy the artist and James Cohan Gallery. Photo Phoebe d'Heurle.

Arnolfini opens its autumn season for 2023 with *Eregata አርጋታ*, the first major solo European museum exhibition of one of Ethiopia's leading contemporary artists, Elias Sime, introducing audiences to a man and maker of extraordinary craftsmanship and collaborative spirit.

Recently the subject of a major touring exhibition in North America, and a prominent artist in the Venice Biennale 59th international exhibition with *The Milk of Dreams* (2022), Sime's approach to both life and art feels vital in the present moment.

Eregata አርጋታ will primarily focus on work from the past six years, including Sime's monumental Venice Biennale commission *Veiled Whispers* (2022), alongside intricately woven abstract topographies from the landmark series *Tightrope* (2009 – present), key works from his ethnographically inspired stitch, yarn and button series, and the tactile fragility of *Bareness*, a large-scale ceramic installation from 2014.

The exhibition's title Eregata አርጋታ emerges from the artist's language, Amharic, translated by Sime as closest in meaning to the calmness and tranquillity of the English word *serene*. Yet, for all its suggestions of calm to a western ear, for Sime *eregata* reflects a recognition that our minds are never truly still or silent: "we struggle to stop and sleep because our brains are constantly stimulated by technology – we are constantly moving faster not slower."

However, Sime's work flows against this tide, embracing a notion of 'slowness' – "My art is slowing it down. The work forces me to slow down." – as he takes years to transform carefully sourced materials, imbuing them with new life, to explore both local and global issues around sustainability, materiality, and the impact of technology upon society.

Collating pile upon pile of electrical wires, computer keyboards, broken cell phones, and circuit boards, Sime hoards these resources until he has assembled enough to commence a new body of work, evoking the suggestion that 'his works are an act of patience'. Objects are stripped down into individual components, such as 'threads' of wire, which are subsequently woven, layered, and re-assembled into abstract forms suggestive of vast landscapes, topographies or cityscapes viewed from above.

The finished works possess a tactile quality, reflective of both the hands that have made them (Sime works with a team of studio assistants) and those of the object's previous owner. Materials often relate to the act of communication – such as in *Tightrope: Echo!?* (2021) where protruding megaphones perform a dual function, broadcasting memories of the clatter of hands upon now silent computer keys – and prompting us to think about the role of both communication and interpretation within our own lives.

The notion of memory, or history contained within his choice of materials, is key to Sime's practice, as he finds new ways to repurpose materials (whether old or new) extending their short lives, whilst also reminding us of their technological redundancy, a timely commentary on the short-lived and ephemeral nature of western technology, and its subsequent impact upon our environment.

Eregata አርጋታ also seeks to explore Sime's relationship to his own environment, most notably the inspirational collaborative project Zoma Museum, in the artist's home city of Addis Ababa, named after young artist Zoma Shifferraw, who died of cancer in 1979.

Founded by Sime and long-time collaborator and anthropologist Meskerem Assegued, this international arts centre embodies the patience and ambitious scale that is so central to Sime's practice, encompassing exhibition spaces, a library, elementary school, edible garden, farm, café, and an artist in residence and project spaces, expanding outwards since 2019.

The buildings embrace ancient and enduring Ethiopian building techniques, made from mud and straw and sculpted by Sime into intricate patterns and textures to create a menagerie of ants, spiders, and caterpillars, amongst others. They embody both Sime and Assegued's shared holistic approach to art and life, in which traditional and ancient rituals and traditions are drawn upon in the making of his work.

Bringing his work to a wider audience, *Eregata እርጋታ* presents Sime as an artist firmly 'situated between the local and global' who weaves together materials, memories and human lives, reminding us of the vital and inherent interconnectedness of our communities.

A programme of live performance, talks and screenings will complement *Eregata እርጋታ*, as well as workshops, community and family activities.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a new publication *Elias Sime: Eregata እርጋታ*, featuring commissioned essays by curator Andria Hickey, Chief Curator The Shed, New York, and architect Nana Biamah-Ofosu, exploring Sime's work and Zoma Museum. The book will be available from October 2023 from the Arnolfini Bookshop.

Eregata እርጋታ, will tour within Europe concluding at Kunstplast Düsseldorf in 2025.

- ends -

For further information please contact Sara Blair | sara.blair@arnolfini.org.uk

Additional images are available at <https://bit.ly/ArnolfiniEliasSimeEregata>

@ArnolfiniArts Instagram / Threads / LinkedIn / Facebook /
www.arnolfini.org.uk

LISTING:

***Eregata እርጋታ* | 21 October 2023 to 18 February 2024**

Tuesday to Sunday, 11am to 6pm, free entry, donations welcome.

Eregata እርጋታ is the first major solo museum European exhibition of one of Ethiopia's leading contemporary artists, Elias Sime, introducing audiences to a man and maker of extraordinary craftsmanship and collaborative spirit.

Focusing on work from the past six years, *Eregata እርጋታ* includes Sime's monumental intricately woven abstract topographies from the landmark series *Tightrope* alongside key examples from his stitch, yarn and button series.

A programme of performance, talks and screenings will accompany *Eregata እርጋታ*, as well as workshops and family activities.

Arnolfini, 16 Narrow Quay, Bristol BS1 4QA 0117 917 2300

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Images here: <https://bit.ly/ArnolfiniEliasSimeEregata>

NOTES TO EDITORS

About Elias Sime

Elias Sime (born 1968 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia) has exhibited extensively around the world. His work has been shown internationally at the Dak'Art Biennale of Contemporary African Art in Dakar, Senegal; the New Crowned Hope Festival in Vienna, Austria; and in the United States at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Studio Museum in Harlem; and a survey exhibition that travelled from the Santa Monica Museum of Art, California, to the North Dakota Museum of Art.

In 2019 Sime received an African Art Award from the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art and was shortlisted for the Hugo Boss Prize 2020. He presented Elias Sime: Tightrope his first major museum exhibition in the USA at The Wellin Museum of Art at Hamilton College, highlighting work from across the last decade, alongside a selection of early works critical to the artist's development. The exhibition travelled to the Akron Art Museum in Akron, Ohio, the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art in Kansas City, Missouri, and the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, Canada in Spring 2021, and was accompanied by his first monographic publication. In 2021 Sime held a solo exhibition Currents 118: Elias Sime at the Saint Louis Art Museum and in 2022 Sime was selected to participate in the 59th Venice Biennale exhibition *The Milk of Dreams*.

Sime's work is included in the permanent collections in the US at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY; Alford Collection of Contemporary Art, Cornell Fine Arts Museum, Rollins College, Orlando, FL; Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, VA; Detroit Institute of Arts, MI; Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines, IA; Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL; Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College,

Hanover, NH; Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, MO; Newark Museum, Newark, NJ; North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, NC; North Dakota Museum of Art, Grand Forks, ND; Pérez Art Museum Miami, Miami, FL; Pizzuti Collection at the Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, OH; Ruth and Elmer Wellin Museum of Art, Hamilton College, Clinton, NY; Saint Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, MO; Carl & Marilyn Thoma Art Foundation, Santa Fe, NM; Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, OH; Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Salt Lake City, UT; Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, VA as well as at Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada; Norval Foundation, Cape Town, South Africa; Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Israel and 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, Japan.

About Zoma Museum

Founded by Sime and long-time collaborator and anthropologist Meskerem Asseged in 2019, this eco-sensitive, international arts centre is a hub of creativity providing a school, gallery amphitheatre, library, vegetables, herbs, flowers and trees garden and animal farm.

Named after Zoma Shiferraw, a young artist who died of cancer in 1979, Zoma Museum acts as a bridge between artists and architects from around the world to create cutting-edge ecological art and architecture. The building is constructed using ancient yet still existing construction techniques with mud, straw, stone, wood, and cement.

In July 2023 a team of Arnolfini's engagement programme, creatives in residence and colleagues from UWE Bristol visited Zoma Museum to experience first hand how the school there engages with their pupils and local community to help shape a variety of activity and community projects around the Eregata ኢርጋታ exhibition.

About Arnolfini

Woven into the fabric of Bristol since 1961, Arnolfini is an international centre of interdisciplinary contemporary arts, presenting an ambitious and wide-ranging programme of visual art, performance, dance, film, and music.

Housed in Bush House, a prominent 19th century former warehouse on the city's harbourside, Arnolfini is a pioneering, inspiring public space for arts and learning, offering an innovative, inclusive and engaging experience for all.

Arnolfini has welcomed artists from around world throughout its history – sharing works by Paula Rego, Jannis Kounellis, John Akomfrah, Grayson Perry, Rachel Whiteread, Peter Doig, Richard Long, Veronica Ryan, Chantal Joffe, Sonia Boyce, Alice Kettle and Frank Bowling, to name just a few - as well as supporting talent from in and around Bristol.

Alongside its main programme, Arnolfini is a centre of everyday creativity and learning, working with a wide range of community and artistic partners, while continuing to explore and develop new collaborations across the city and beyond. Spaces are used regularly by families, schools and colleges, health and wellbeing groups.

Through sharing a 62+ year archive of exhibition slides, publications and an extensive artist book collection, Arnolfini celebrates its heritage and the wide-reaching impact the organisation has had since its foundation.

From 2019, Director Gary Topp and team have sought to honour Arnolfini's founder Jeremy Rees' principle to 'Enjoy Yourself', welcoming everyone into the accessible space, and inviting engagement, in any number of ways.

Arnolfini is part of the University of the West of England and a key element of their City Campus.

An independent charity (CIO), Arnolfini is supported by Arts Council England and the Ashley Clinton Barker-Mills Trust.

About UWE Bristol

The University of the West of England (UWE Bristol) has a global and inclusive outlook, with approximately 36,000 students and strong industry networks and connections with over 1,000 employers. Research at UWE Bristol focuses on real world problems and the University plays a pivotal role in the regional economy. With over £300 million invested in infrastructure, buildings and facilities across all Campuses, UWE Bristol is creating a place for learning that is innovative, ambitious, connected, enabling and inclusive. UWE Bristol is ranked 24th in the Guardian university league table. www.uwe.ac.uk

About Arts Council England

Arts Council England is the national development agency for creativity and culture. By 2030 we want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish and where everyone of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences. Between 2018 and 2022, we will invest £1.45 billion of public money from government and an estimated £860 million from the National Lottery to help deliver this vision. www.artscouncil.org.uk

About Ashley Clinton Barker-Mills Trust

Arnolfini has been supported by a linked charity, the Ashley Clinton Barker Mills Trust (ACBMT) for almost 60 years.

Arnolfini founders Jeremy and Annabel Rees were first introduced to the artists and benefactors Peter and Caroline Barker-Mill in 1963, by the London gallerist Lesley Waddington. It was a fortuitous meeting that was the catalyst in allowing Arnolfini to develop from a small volunteer-run private gallery into a major international arts centre.

The Ashley Clinton Barker-Mills Trust (ACBMT) principle is to work with Arnolfini, primarily by making annual grants from the income earned on its investments, as well as funding modest, one-off capital grants to help the Arnolfini transition to its current financial model. In more recent years members of the ACMBT have become more involved working with Arnolfini to help plan its future.

www.arnolfini.org.uk/about/ashley-clinton-barker-mills-trust