

Elias Sime

Aug 28 – Oct 27
Keizersgracht 241

Tightrope: Concave Triangles

Tightrope: Concave Triangles presents eight sculptures made from thousands of small, identically cut pieces of timber glued together to make a sphere. When the sphere was cut in half, it became two domes. Then each dome was cut in halves, until it transformed into eight concave triangles. The concaved shape represents unity, collaboration and love. In reality, the pieces are created individually, but symbolically they represent a sphere split in pieces. Each piece is covered with electric wires, dead watches, keyboards, and motherboards narrating different contemporary stories about current issues.

Elias started making these pieces about a year ago. At the time, he was expanding on his earlier *tightrope* series, where he was expressing his appreciation of and apprehension towards electronic technology, particularly smartphones. He often said that his work was about the need to slow down and question how these communication devices consume our time. He sees them as both productive and destructive. "When we walk slow" he said, "we see more, when we talk less, we learn more." As we travelled around the world, one of the things Elias found fascinating was watching lovers in public places consumed by their smartphones. He often says that the machine communication in their hands barely gives them time to communicate face to face. "I don't understand" he said, "how relationships can be sustained without spending time and learning about each other's emotions through talking to one another, reading each other's body language."

When Covid-19 overwhelmed the world, the narratives of his work changed. He once told me that this pandemic is redefining the concept of globalization. He said, "It feels like time has suddenly stopped ticking." As the economy is collapsing and the virus continues to claim more lives, the only possible solution to overcome it is to start looking for the root of the problem. Pandemics have come and gone. Like nothing before, this one has confronted humanity by defying time and space. Covid-19 is merciless. It is invisible, odorless, untouchable, silent, and tasteless. It forced us to hide our identities with facemasks. Communication is a combination of spoken and body language. Often, the latter is louder than the former. When facial expressions are hidden, ulterior motives can only be read through the eyes. The distance Covid-19 created between us has interrupted our social norms. Our conversations are dominated by our our fear of the uncertain future. Heroic and villainous stories of those who died saving lives and those who fibbed to stay in power seem to create a morphology of a new invisible deity called Covid-19.

I walked with Elias in his studio through the eight pieces selected for this exhibition. He said that each is about Covid-19 because its effect is unprecedented, and we are living in the midst of it. Indeed, we are all walking on a tightrope where the slightest mistake we make can cost us our lives. "Suddenly," he said "time has stopped. We have nowhere to go but stop and rethink our values. Nothing is familiar anymore. It is as if the clocks have stopped ticking forcing us to look inward and examine how we got here and where we can go from here." As we were walking, he pointed at one of the pieces and said, "When the first news of Covid-19 was announced, like most people, I saw the world with tunnel vision, dreaming, working and planning for a bright future. I believed the virus was isolated in one area and would be controlled like SARS, Ebola and the like. With dreams and aspirations, life seemed to continue as we knew it. Then the news announced that the virus had spread in different parts of Europe. This shocked me. Europe, where folks from poor



Elias Sime | *Concave Triangle* | 2020

nations scramble to get to, is now victim to the virus? That night, I went straight to my studio and started working on *Concave Triangle #1*. This piece, covered with red woven wires, has a circle between two tunnels made with broken watches I collected over many years. Before I finished the piece, I learned that the virus was killing an unprecedented number of people so I started working on *Concave Triangle #2*. I covered the surface with red woven wires, similarly to the earlier piece. I then cut out several leaf-like shapes and filled them with white keyboards. As I was hammering the wires, all I was thinking was how the familiar leaves are gone. How certainty was gone because the virus transmits in many ways. We are told that the safest place is home. The end seems to extend farther and farther away. So, I made two moons, one blended with the leaves and the other with solid color.

As the agony of the virus in Europe was dominating the news, the US reported its first infection and in such a short time its death rate became the highest in the world. Who could have imagined that Covid-19 can defeat the richest and most influential nation in the world? In response to this, I made *Concave Triangle #3* with earth-toned woven wires and three differently sized circles of dead watches with the largest one unravelling. By this time, the virus has spread all over the world including Ethiopia.

When he finished telling me the story of *Concave Triangle #3*, he stopped. He said, "Now that you have a hint of the concept, I want to leave the rest of the pieces for the audience to interpret. One thing that is certain is that humans will not survive the virus and its aftermath unless we change our perspectives. The greatest lesson to learn from Covid-19 is that we are all vulnerable and that none of us are immune to it. Surviving it requires a collaborative effort regardless of our physical or mental differences.

—By Meskerem Assegued

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For more information, interview and royalty free image requests, please contact the gallery manager Jorien de Vries: press@grimmgallery.com +31 (0)20 6752465

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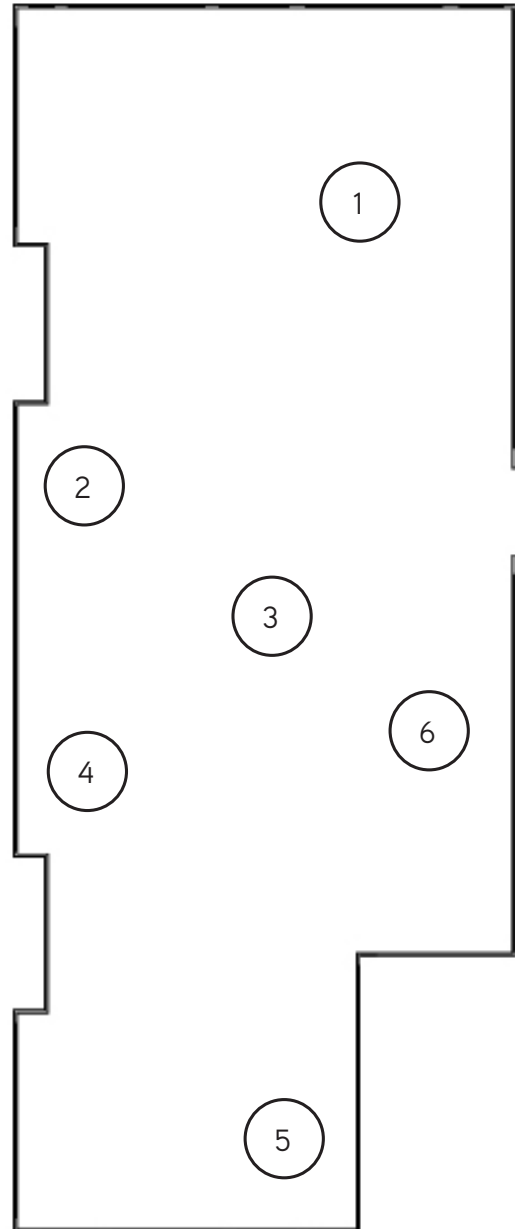
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About the artist

Elias Sime (b.1968 Addis Ababa, ET) is profoundly involved in the Ethiopian art community, and has travelled to remote areas throughout the country researching local knowledge and traditions. In 2002, Sime co-founded and designed the ZOMA Contemporary Art Center in Addis Ababa with the founding director, curator, and anthropologist Meskerem Asseged. In 2019 he was commissioned by Ethiopian Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed Ali, to design the public gardens for the National Palace of Ethiopia. In that same year, Sime was also awarded the Smithsonian African Art Award, and shortlisted for the Hugo Boss prize 2020.

Sime's current exhibitions include; *Currents 118* at the Saint Louis Art Museum, MO (US) and *Tightrope* which has travelled from the Ruth and Elmer Wellin Museum of Art, Clinton, NY (US) where it was shown in 2019, to the Akron Art Museum, OH (US) in 2020, and is now being exhibited at the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art in Kansas City, MO (US). *Tightrope* will next travel to Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (CA) in 2021. Sime's work has been exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY (US); the Studio Museum in Harlem, NY (US); the MCA in Chicago, IL (US), and in 2009, a retrospective of Sime's work travelled from the Santa Monica Museum of Art, CA (US), to the North Dakota Museum of Art, ND (US).

Elias Sime's work is included in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY (US); The Israel Museum, Jerusalem (IL); Norval Foundation, Cape Town (ZA); North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, NC (US); Toledo Museum of Art, OH (US); Perez Museum of Art, Miami, FL (US); Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, VA (US); Detroit Institute of Arts, MI (US); Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, VA (US); North Dakota Museum of Art, ND (US); Newark Museum, NJ (US); Pizzuti Collection, Columbus, OH (US); Harn Museum of Art, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL (US); Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, NH (US); Ruth and Elmer Wellin Museum of Art, Hamilton College, Clinton, NY (US); Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, MO (US); and the Carl and Marilyn Thoma Art Foundation, Santa Fe, NM (US).



1. *Concave Triangle*, 2020
Reclaimed electrical wires on wood
185 x 185 x 6 cm

2. *Concave Triangle*, 2020
Reclaimed electrical wires and watch faces on wood
185 x 185 x 6 cm

3. *Concave Triangle*, 2020
Reclaimed electrical wires and computer keys on wood
185 x 185 x 6 cm

4. *Concave Triangle*, 2020
Reclaimed electrical wires and computer keys on wood
185 x 185 x 6 cm

5. *Concave Triangle*, 2020
Reclaimed computer components and watch bands on wood
185 x 185 x 6 cm

6. *Concave Triangle*, 2020
Reclaimed computer keys and components on wood
185 x 185 x 6 cm

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