Art, Architecture, and Matters of Heritage (Addis Ababa, 30 Sep–2 Oct 26)

Addis Ababa University, Alle School of Fine Arts and Design, Auditorium, Sep 30–Oct 2, 2026

Vera-Simone Schulz

Art, Architecture, and Matters of Heritage across the Horn of Africa and Beyond

Concept and Organization: Bekele Mekonnen (Addis Ababa University) and Vera-Simone Schulz (Leuphana University Lüneburg/KHI Florenz)

Issues related to heritage, the built environment and the arts are at the core of this symposium which brings together perspectives from the realms of architecture, transcultural art history, contemporary art, literature, and history. The workshop will discuss case studies from across the Horn of Africa and beyond but will also place a particular focus on the city of Addis Ababa. It will interrogate the role of Italian colonialism in the Horn of Africa and the military occupation of Ethiopia and their afterlives, as they have come to be inscribed into urban fabrics. This does not only concern the role of colonial architecture. Piassa, deriving from piazza, the Italian word for square, for example, continues to name a city quarter in Addis. The symposium will discuss case studies from other colonial powers in the wider region. But its aim is also to decenter Italian colonial heritage that so often dominates discourses on the architecture in the Horn of Africa and instead center local histories and perspectives. The symposium seeks to approach cities, infrastructures, and the built environment regarding questions of local forms of building, local architects, inhabitation, memory, and resistance. It is interested in the institutions and archives of the city, the history and role of the Alle School of Fine Arts of Addis Ababa, not only as Ethiopia's oldest modern art institution but also with its great impact on art education across the Horn of Africa and beyond. It is interested in questions related to cities and storytelling, oral histories of buildings, squares, streets, markets, parks, but also the ways how writers have described urban fabrics, the role of the built environment in novels and poetry. The symposium will discuss the entanglements between urban spaces and the arts, visual and material culture, their layers, stratigraphies, and temporalities. A poem can remember a street differently from a map, a painting can preserve a building that new constructions have erased. It is interested in individual actors, how architects, artists, writers, but also residents, merchants, and students have made and continue to make Addis Ababa and other cities and towns their own. It will discuss intersections between architecture, visual and material culture, the role of photography, postcards, and processes of image-making of the city. The symposium will focus on the role of Addis and Ethiopia for Panafrican thinking and initiatives. In 1963, the Charter of the Organization of African Unity was signed in Addis Ababa, which remains the seat of its successor, the African Union. It will thus consider the past, present, and possible futures of the arts, the built environment, and matters of heritage in the Horn of Africa and beyond within these wider regional, continental, and transcontinental horizons.

Wednesday, September 30, 2026

9:30 Bekele Mekonnen (Addis Ababa University) and Vera-Simone Schulz (Leuphana University/KHI Florenz): Welcome and Introduction

10:00 Participant Introductions

10:30 Bekele Mekonnen (Addis Ababa University): Archive Heritage: Old Documents and Historical Materials

11:00 Vera-Simone Schulz (Leuphana University/ KHI Florenz): Material Culture, the Built Environment, and Matters of Heritage

11:30 Emmaus Kimani (Nairobi): From the Arts to Cultural Heritage: Knowledge Creation, Selection, Preservation, and Memory

12:00 Lunch break

13:30 Joint Visit and Discussion of the Archive of the Alle School of Fine Arts and Design

15:30 Joint Visit and Discussion of the Sculpture Park of the Alle School of Fine Arts and Design

16:30 Coffee break

17:00 Michael Tsegaye (Addis Ababa): Photography and Heritage

17:30 Mahder Gebru Meshesha (Addis Ababa University): Exploring Multisensory Approaches in Ethiopian Heritage Spaces to Enhance the Experience of Visually Impaired Audiences

18:00 Joint Discussion

18:30 Dinner

Thursday, October 1, 2026

9:30 Joint Visit and Discussion of the Adwa Victory Museum

12:30 Lunch break

14:00 Tadesse Girmay Gebreegziabher (Addis Ababa

University): The Casa del Fascio in Addis Ababa: Predictive Risk Modeling as a Tool for Decentering Colonial Heritage Narratives

14:30 Sarri Elfaitouri (TAJARROD): The Senussi Zawiya and Its Spiritual Politics of Resistance

15:00 Coffee break

15:30 Tirsit Mulugeta (Addis Ababa University): Beyond the Map: Exploring Movement, Heritage, Experience and Mapping as an Act of Making

16:00 Lydia Muthuma (Strathmore University): The Subliminal Dialogue Mediated by Public Art in Nairobi's Historic City

16:30 Fred Mbogo (The Technical University of Kenya): Histories, Identity, and Space

17:00 Joint Discussion

17:30 Joint Visit and Discussion of the Alle School of Fine Arts Exhibition

18:30 Dinner

Friday, October 2, 2026

9:30 Joint Visit of the National Archives of Ethiopia

12:30 Lunch break

14:00 Mandefro Mamuye (Addis Ababa University): Art and Heritage

14:30 Rediet Shibabaw (Addis Ababa University): Heritage, Film, and the Moving Image

15:00 Coffee break

15:30 Nagwan Abdelfatah Abuelwafa Saleh (University of Khartoum): Rebuilding Khartoum: Architecture, Heritage, and Resilience in a Post-Conflict Context

16:00 Art, Architecture, and the Future of Heritage: A Plenary Discussion with Students of the Alle School of Fine Arts and Design and the School of

Architecture

17:30 Final Discussion and Outlook

18:30 Dinner

Reference:
CONF: Art, Architecture, and Matters of Heritage (Addis Ababa, 30 Sep-2 Oct 26). In: ArtHist.net, Sep 29, 2026 (accessed Nov 24, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/54468>.