

## Division of Public Programs

### Sample of a Successful Application

This document contains the narrative and walkthrough of a previously funded grant application. Every successful application is different, and this application may have been prepared to meet a slightly different set of guidelines. Each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations, as well as the requirements in the current notice of funding opportunity (NOFO). Prospective applicants should consult the current Public Humanities Projects NOFO at <https://www.neh.gov/grants/public/public-humanities-projects> for instructions. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with the NEH Division of Public Programs staff well before a grant deadline.

The attached application is incomplete. Portions have been deleted to protect the privacy interests of an individual, and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information, and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

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**Project Title:** Ethiopia at the Crossroads

**Institution:** Walters Art Museum

**Project Director:** Dr. Christine Sciacca

**Grant Program:** Public Humanities Projects: Exhibition (travelling) Implementation

The Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, Maryland respectfully requests a grant in the amount of \$400,000 from the National Endowment for the Humanities for the implementation of a landmark international loan exhibition of Ethiopian art in Fall 2023. Provisionally titled *Ethiopia at the Crossroads*, this traveling exhibition celebrates the artistic traditions of Ethiopia from antiquity to the present. Ethiopia embodies the idea of “crossroads” geographically, historically, and culturally. Seated in the Horn of Africa, the country is an intersection of diverse climates, religions, and cultures. By examining Ethiopian art as representative of the nation’s notable history and relationships, *Ethiopia at the Crossroads* demonstrates the enormous cultural significance of this African nation.

This will be the first major art exhibition in America to examine Ethiopian art in a global context. Ethiopia is renowned for its unique and visually dynamic Christian art. As the second country to adopt Christianity in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, pre-dating the Roman Empire’s conversion, Ethiopia produced a tradition of distinctive Christian art ranging from illuminated manuscripts that rival their European counterparts to stunning architecture and art in various forms and materials. *Ethiopia at the Crossroads* notably moves beyond a focused look at Ethiopia’s relationship to Christianity to a more holistic view that also includes its long-established Jewish and Muslim populations and their respective artistic traditions. The exhibition examines and celebrates Ethiopian art as a highly evocative expression of cultural exchange between Africa, the Middle East, India, and Europe.

The Walters is uniquely capable of exploring this topic, as the museum holds one of the most extensive collections of Ethiopian art outside of Ethiopia. Indeed, the museum was the organizing venue for *African Zion*, the first major exhibition of Ethiopian art in the United States. Mounted in 1993, it represented the beginning of the Walters’ commitment to the Ethiopian community in the Baltimore/Washington DC area, the largest diaspora community from this African nation in the United States. Over the past three decades, a handful of exhibitions have studied the rich history of Ethiopian art; however, this important artistic tradition has been studied primarily in isolation. ***Ethiopia at the Crossroads* promotes a more nuanced understanding of Ethiopian artistic traditions and their global significance for scholars and visitors alike and moves beyond a Euro-centric approach to Ethiopian art.** Scholars have acknowledged that Ethiopia stands at a junction between Africa, the Middle East, the Mediterranean World, and India, thanks to its location at a critical juncture and its placement along trade routes. However, no exhibition has studied the specific ways in which Ethiopian art came into contact with the art of surrounding cultures. From the 3<sup>rd</sup>-century CE to the present day, Ethiopian artists have developed distinctive traditions while responding to those of Coptic Egypt, Nubia, South Arabia, Byzantium, Armenia, Italy, the greater African continent, and India, among others. For example, Ethiopian coins from the 3<sup>rd</sup> through 7<sup>th</sup>-century CE show relationships with other major ancient cultures as near as Nubia and as far as Rome and India. The exhibition presents the Walters’ incomparable collection of Ethiopian art and loans side-by-side with artworks from these neighboring cultures, thereby enriching our understanding of the complex exchange of visual culture between Africa and the world.

This exhibition will also challenge western and Euro-centric conceptions about the spread of Christianity and the idea of Africa as being the product of European colonization. Often in our U.S. culture, when people think of Christianity and Africa, there are assumptions about colonization and that African people adopted Christianity because of European influence or ministry. This exhibition celebrates Ethiopia as a storied and highly evocative culture, as well as a place of origin for extremely influential building blocks for our modern society, including the “Lucy” fossil skeleton (proof of the evolutionary bridge toward humanity’s bipedal evolution), earliest Christianity, and the exchange across Africa, Asia, and Europe. As such, *Ethiopia at the Crossroads* will be an opportunity for our audiences to have more global perspectives. Not only is Ethiopia one of the first adopters of Christianity, Ethiopia has never been colonized, which is a point of pride for Ethiopians and a topic that will be discussed in the exhibition. This exhibition highlights Ethiopia as a focal point for many humanities traditions -- language, history, archaeology, comparative religion, arts, and social science -- and enlivens the NEH’s mission to relate the humanities to life today.

Through modern conservation science and the work of practicing artists and scholars, audiences can better understand historic art making. Conservation and technical study of historical artworks have

revealed new details of artistic technique that speak to the exchange between different cultures. Until now, relatively little technical analysis has been conducted on Ethiopian art objects. The exhibition will incorporate findings by Walters conservators and conservation scientists that shed new light on the techniques and materials of Ethiopian craftsmen. *Ethiopia at the Crossroads* also examines the tangible effect the artworks have had on contemporary Ethiopian artists, who often engage with historical artworks from Ethiopia, incorporating their themes, motifs, and stylistic features in varying degrees. The exhibition explores these connections through the works of Ethiopian artists based both in Ethiopia and in the U.S.

This project reflects research and feedback collected in the past two years, thanks to a 2019 NEH planning grant. Scholarly research, travel to Ethiopia and potential additional venues, front-end evaluation, community advisory input, conservation, initial preparations for the *Ethiopia at the Crossroads* exhibition and publication, as well as preliminary groundbreaking conservation research into the methods and materials of Ethiopian art have already been completed. Dr. Christine Sciacca, Curator of European Art, 300-1400 CE, is organizing the exhibition with input from other scholars in the field of the humanities. The exhibition will present approximately 200 objects ranging from coins, painted icons, illuminated manuscripts, metalwork, and carved wood crosses of various scales. These objects are drawn from the Walters' world-renowned collection of Ethiopian art. We are also pursuing loans from other American, European, and Ethiopian lenders.

The exhibition will open in Fall 2023 at the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, Maryland and will be on view to the public from September to January. Admission to *Ethiopia at the Crossroads*, as with the rest of the museum, will be entirely free for all visitors. A scholarly publication and a robust schedule of educational programs will explore the themes and histories of *Ethiopia at the Crossroads* and will help connect the exhibition with visitors' lives today. In spring 2024, the exhibition will travel to one or more other American venues either in the Midwest or the West Coast, particularly locations with significant Ethiopian and Ethiopian-American populations. This allows for the broadest exposure of the exhibition. We are currently in negotiations with (b) (6) for the exhibition to travel there (a letter of intent has been submitted with this application), and several other museums have expressed interest. This will offer audiences across the county an opportunity to connect with this material. We anticipate that audiences in Minneapolis will particularly respond to this exhibition, as there is a significant diaspora of Ethiopians in Minnesota, as there is also in the Baltimore/Washington D.C. area.



Follower of Fre Seyon, *Diptych with Mary and Her Son Flanked by Archangels, Apostles and a Saint*, Late 15th-century, tempera on wood, the Walters Art Museum

## **B. Humanities Content**

At its core, *Ethiopia at the Crossroads* is a meditation on Ethiopia's foundational role in world culture and the humanities. Throughout its history, the people of Ethiopia directly and regularly interacted

with people from cultures of the Mediterranean, the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa. Scholars have typically studied these encounters from the perspective of the groups who traveled to Ethiopia and their influence on Ethiopia's cultural production. This exhibition, instead, highlights both the mutual exchange at these points of contact and Ethiopia's global impact. Deeper examination of these works, allowed for by this project, helps to uncover aspects of cultural trade and artistic efflorescence amongst Ethiopia and other prominent kingdoms across the world during the Middle Ages. The project is inherently interdisciplinary, incorporating material studies, religious history and the history of religious conversion, economic history through trade, political history of diplomacy and conquest, and literary history.

The cultural artifacts of Ethiopia represented at the Walters and at numerous other institutions span approximately 1,750 years of its known history. The plan for the exhibition is to present material chronologically to provide grounding for visitors and to familiarize them with Ethiopian cultural periods. Throughout the exhibition, key moments of encounter between Ethiopia and surrounding cultures will be highlighted to deepen understanding of particularly impactful points of exchange. Some of the overarching themes addressed within this chronology are as follows: Ethiopia as African Nation, Points of Encounter, and Materials: Local and Foreign (as outlined on the walkthrough). One focus throughout will be the human role in the creation and movement of these objects. Conservation studies will also address techniques of Ethiopian artists to uncover details about the extent of Ethiopian cultural exchange.

The humanities content of *Ethiopia at the Crossroads* has been significantly advanced and influenced by activities undertaken thanks to an NEH Planning Grant. The 2019 NEH Planning Grant for the exhibition allowed the Walters lead curator and conservator to travel to Ethiopia to study Ethiopian artworks, visit important historical sites, and see the landscape of the Christian Highlands of Ethiopia, where many of the exhibition objects were created. Speaking with Ethiopian colleagues in museums and in the contemporary art world was also instrumental in laying the groundwork for scholarly collaboration and potential loans for the exhibition. Hearing about their increasingly inclusive approach to representing all aspects of Ethiopian culture in their displays encouraged the Walters curator to include a section in the exhibition on Ethiopia's Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region (SNNPR) and their cultural production. The grant has also enabled for the formation of a Scholarly Advisory Committee and a Community Advisory Group for the exhibition. Both committees have met over the course of 2020-2021, and they have evaluated the exhibition themes, generally supporting the proposed themes, but helping to hone the details of how they are presented. In some cases, they have proposed new and fundamental themes, such as Ethiopian architecture, which were not originally included in the exhibition plan.

The impact of Ethiopian art continues today through the movement of Ethiopian art and people beyond its borders. Although relatively little-known outside of Ethiopian communities, collections of Ethiopian art in the United States and Europe parallel the Ethiopian diaspora communities in those regions. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, artists have responded to and built upon this legacy. An exploration of contemporary Ethiopian art by artists both in and outside of Ethiopia will be in conversation with the historic works of art on view and will testify to their global reach. This grant would afford us the opportunity to recruit a guest curator to specialize in contemporary Ethiopian art for the exhibition. This position would augment the work of Dr. Sciacca, whose expertise is the medieval period. The guest curator would help identify, coordinate, and contextualize contemporary art for the exhibition.

**Theme: Ethiopia as African Nation** Previous studies have noted Ethiopia's interaction with its neighbors across the Red Sea, with Mediterranean cultures, and even with the Indian sub-continent through long-distance trade networks, but they have been hesitant to discuss its relationship with other African nations. Ethiopian art is often discussed apart from that of Africa, because, uniquely, Ethiopia was primarily a Christian kingdom from the beginning of its recorded history in the early 4<sup>th</sup>-century CE. Modern audiences might assume the existence of Christianity in Africa as the result of European colonization and their imposition of their religious beliefs, however Ethiopia's history demonstrates that Christianity is indigenous to Africa. Furthermore, the three Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have long histories of coexistence in Ethiopia dating back to the initial years of their respective

origins. These religions were the major drivers of artistic production in the country from their arrival until the present day.

This project examines interactions between Ethiopia and the African continent through trade and political and religious relationships, such as envoys sent to neighboring Nubia and elsewhere, and religious delegations sent to Egypt to visit and receive guidance from the Coptic patriarch in Alexandria. The exhibition also explores and characterizes the rarely discussed relationship between Ethiopia and sub-Saharan Africa.

**Theme: Points of Encounter** The exhibition looks at the various points of encounter between Ethiopia and surrounding cultures, particularly through the lenses of trade and religion. Ethiopia fostered robust trade relationships with nations in several directions. One pertinent example is the relationship between Armenia and Ethiopia, the first and second Christian nations, respectively. The similarity of motifs found in both Armenian and Ethiopian illuminated manuscripts may be the result of the portability of books and the trade routes established by Armenians.

The movement of religion often followed trade routes, particularly those going north, across the Mediterranean Sea and through the Middle East, and into Europe. Another point of exchange between Ethiopia and its northern neighbors, as well as other Christian groups, may have occurred at the major religious centers of Rome and Jerusalem, where clerics are known to have gathered and conversed. The Ethiopian court sent envoys to Italy and Portugal beginning in the early 15<sup>th</sup>-century and likely brought objects of Ethiopian manufacture with them. Likewise, Europeans also traveled to Ethiopia, inspired initially by the pursuit of the legend of the Christian king, Prester John, who was thought to be Ethiopian. Later, Italian artists traveled to Ethiopia and took up residence there, working side by side with local artists at the court. In the 17<sup>th</sup>-century, the Jesuits set out to convert Ethiopians to Catholicism, continuing their route through Ethiopia to Goa, India. While they failed at their attempts, the religious imagery they brought with them left a lasting impression on Ethiopian artistic production and Christian iconography.

The 2018 NEH-funded exhibition, *World on the Horizon: Swahili Arts across the Indian Ocean*, at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana and National Museum of African Art serves as a fruitful model for the discussion of encounter and cultural exchange between Africa and the surrounding world. Rather than treating the countries along the Swahili coast of Africa as insular and inward-looking, the exhibition and catalogue argued for Africa's "global connectivity" and its central role in the broader world of the Indian Ocean. The Walters exhibition makes a similar "global connectivity" argument for Ethiopia, given its placement on the Horn of Africa at the nexus of global travel and trade routes. Ethiopian arts likewise demonstrate the impact of cultural exchange both imported and exported.

**Theme: Materials: Local and Foreign, Ivory and Gold** Materials are important evidence for deciphering exchange between Ethiopia and its neighbors, and inherently raise many questions. How did encounters between Ethiopian artists and those from the lands beyond affect the materials used by Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian artists? Do pigments, binding media, artistic techniques, and support types remain the same throughout Ethiopia's history? Do local materials and techniques remain the norm, or are non-native features incorporated into artistic practice? These questions will be answered through groundbreaking technical analysis by Walters conservators and scientists, in conjunction with colleagues in the field.

Despite the accessibility of precious materials such as African gold and ivory, surviving examples of artistic production in Ethiopia displays a distinct lack of their use, with the exception of early gold coinage and in Christian liturgical vessels beginning in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century. Dr. Verena Krebs has suggested in her forthcoming book on Niccolò Brancalone, a Venetian artist working at the court of Zar'a Ya'qob in Ethiopia, that Ethiopian envoys were aware of the desirability of these materials in Europe. Instead of keeping them for local use, precious materials were traded for Byzantine icons and liturgical objects from Europe that were used in religious practice in Ethiopia. In *Ethiopia at the Crossroads*, examples of Byzantine paintings from Ethiopian churches and devotional icons that combine European-made panels with Ethiopian ones illustrate this practice. This trade in materials between Africa and Europe is also the

subject of the exhibition, *Caravans of Gold, Fragments in Time: Art, Culture, and Exchange across Medieval Saharan Africa* (the Block Museum of Art, 2019), an NEH Planning Grant and Implementation Grant recipient. The approach taken in that project, of tracing the trans-Saharan trade routes, will provide crucial context for revealing and understanding the interaction between Africa, the Mediterranean, and Europe in the Middle Ages. Since *Caravans of Gold* does not address the Horn of Africa, our project is an important continuation of these narratives; it situates Ethiopia's specific prominence as a trade center and international hub. Our team is working with the curator and scholars for *Caravans of Gold* to discuss new approaches to placing African art in a broader cultural context of global networks, drawing Ethiopia into the conversation for the first time.

### **C. Project Formats**

Ethiopian art and history is seldom, if at all, taught in American schools. This exhibition will be an important learning opportunity for different communities across the United States to explore Ethiopian art, culture, and history, and to gain a richer understanding of the multitude of African artistic traditions and how they relate to audiences in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century. A grant from the NEH will support the *Ethiopia at the Crossroads* exhibition, a publication, and associated programs.

The Walters prioritizes visitor experience and community engagement, particularly with local Ethiopian and African diaspora communities, for this project. Contemporary art will play a vital role in bridging historic Ethiopian art to the lives of people today, and will be integrated throughout all sections of the exhibition to emphasize the connections between historic and modern-day Ethiopian art. The Walters Art Museum will present *Ethiopia at the Crossroads* as an exhibition with in-gallery interactive components and related educational programming during its run. As the process continues, the museum will incorporate feedback from experts as well as members of the local, particularly Ethiopian, community into the exhibition content, interpretation, interactives, and associated programs. An accompanying publication of scholarship, new curatorial cataloguing, and conservation findings will further enhance the exhibition's reach.

#### **1) Exhibition organization and visitor experience**

The exhibition will be mounted in the Walters 4,500 sq. ft. special exhibition space on the first floor of the museum, adjacent to the main museum entrance. The design of the exhibition will include wall-sized images or projections of Ethiopian landscapes, architecture, and contemporary Ethiopian people; this will act as a backdrop against which the objects will be shown in order to provide context for visitors. Two sources for such images would be those captured by Prof. Michael Gervers, University of Toronto, Scarborough, creator of Mazgaba Seelat, an online database of over 65,000 photographs, and Chester A. Higgins, Jr., whose photos of daily life in Ethiopia were featured as a small exhibition in the concluding gallery of the *African Zion* exhibition at the Walters in 1993. A film of an Ethiopian liturgical procession that features the types of objects displayed in the exhibition (processional crosses, hand crosses, icons, etc.) would be an instructive and engaging supplement to the exhibition. The Walters has had great success in including video footage of ceremonies and rituals in the recently re-installed Arts of Asia galleries, which provides context for devotional artworks and deepens the sensory experience. Audio recordings of local Ethiopian community members responding to select artworks will be available in the galleries, either through listening stations or through QR codes for visitors' mobile devices.

Currently, the plan for the exhibition layout begins with an introductory section on Ethiopia's early history and religious and linguistic foundations, and then proceeds to highlight Ethiopia's major points of interaction with surrounding cultures. While it is chronological, some periods overlap each other, such as the Aksumite Kingdom and Nubia, both of which are ancient and show distinct exchange with Ethiopian culture. From the introduction to the end, works by contemporary artists will be installed throughout the galleries to both juxtapose and underscore the significance of the historic artworks. The Walters team is conferring with the advisory council regarding the exhibition plan and the presentation of the stated humanities themes.



- (b) (6)

### 3) Open Access to technical information on Ethiopian artworks

This project affords the opportunity to increase public access to new technical studies of Ethiopian art. Due to the lack of access of conservators and scientists to this material in Ethiopian churches and secular institutions, a technical study of Ethiopian art is rare. Even American museums that have collections of Ethiopian objects and conservation resources have not typically focused on this area of their collection. This project presents an opportunity to prioritize this material in terms of conservation study, treatment, and technical analysis, as described in further detail in Project History below. As a result, the Walters is uniquely positioned to present more detailed information about the materials and techniques discovered in this analysis, through our open access journal (*Journal of the Walters Art Museum*), scholarly conference presentations, the Walters online collections catalogue, and through our Conservation Window, a space where visitors can view conservators at work and directly engage with them. We may also collaborate with other institutions, such as (b) (6), who have conducted smaller studies on their Ethiopian materials.

### 4) Gallery Interactives and Experiences

*Ethiopia at the Crossroads* will offer visitors multifaceted experiences in the galleries in order to give a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the cultures, traditions, and varied perspectives represented in the exhibition. These gallery enhancements include (but are not limited to):

- Multimedia presentations, including video footage of Ethiopian ceremonies or processions and audio of chanting;
- Listening stations where visitors can listen to community members discuss what this art means to them or featured contemporary artists giving insight into their creations;
- A writing desk where people of all ages can practice Ethiopic lettering alongside artworks highlighting the importance of language and words in Ethiopian culture;
- An icon draped with a veil (called a “netela”), as they would be presented in a church in Ethiopia (per feedback from the Community Advisory Committee);
- Scent stations that evoke the fragrance of Ethiopian devotional spaces and/or manuscripts;
- Large scale images of Ethiopian landscape and architecture.

Additional details about gallery enhancements and interactives are included in the Walkthrough.

### 5) Educational Resources (Adults, College Students, Community, Schools, Families)

Programs will play an essential role in promoting the themes of *Ethiopia at the Crossroads* and connecting them to the lives of visitors today. Programs provide contemporary relevance for many audiences and help them to approach art and cultures with which they may not be familiar. On average, about 50 percent of our audiences visit the museum to attend a program similar to those listed below. The Walters Art Museum offers the majority of these programs for free or at very low cost. During the planning stages, Dr. Sciacca and her team will be developing relationships with local artists and community partners to prepare a full slate of programs. A range of offerings will accompany the exhibition, including preK-12 student tours, musical performances, gallery talks, art-making workshops, demonstrations, and more. Among the programs under consideration:

- Opening day talk/panel featuring scholars and members of the Community and/or Advisory group;
- One or two performances by Ethiopian musicians. Some possibilities include (b) (6) or local Washington, DC jazz musicians. Performance/talk with Meklit Hadero, who is an Ethiopian-American singer/songwriter, and a TED Fellow. She is the founder of the Arba Minch Collective, a group of artists, writers, and musicians who establish cultural exchanges among Ethiopians in Ethiopia and members of the Ethiopian diaspora.



- A program with Tsedaye Makonnen, an Ethiopian-American artist whose work was on view at the Walters in the Janet and Walter Sondheim 2021 Exhibition. She is a multidisciplinary artist whose studio, curatorial, and research-based practice threads together her identity as a daughter of Ethiopian immigrants, a Black American woman, doula, and a mother.
- Rebecca Haile, author of *Held at a Distance*, to speak about her experience being born in Ethiopia, growing up in America, and returning to Ethiopia. The author has also recently founded a school for gifted children in Ethiopia focused on training future Ethiopian leaders. To be combined with a signing of Haile's book.
- Interactive and inquiry based tours for preK-12 students. In-person tours will prioritize reaching classes in the Baltimore-Washington DC area, including supporting Title 1 school visits with provided bus funding. Virtual tours will extend the experience and content to students across the country.
- Teacher professional development based on work with our teacher advisory committee to map interdisciplinary curricular connections to school groups.
- Workshop for visitors to make personalized healing scrolls to match their own desires and aspirations, a personal version of the traditional Ethiopian healing scroll.
- Artist/calligraphy demonstrations using traditional Ethiopian materials.
- Prayer ceremony in collaboration with local Ethiopian churches. Dr. Sciacca and the J. Paul Getty Museum had great success with such an event held in the galleries and led by priests from the local Greek Orthodox Church during the 2006 *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai* exhibition.
- A free family festival. We hold three to four of these each year celebrating different themes and cultures. Festivals typically each attract 1,500-2,500 people.
- A two-day symposium on Ethiopian art and culture held at the museum for a joint scholarly and public audience. A keynote presentation will be open to the public, and additional sessions will be held with a number of scholars, including contributors to the publication.
- Spice workshop with Telila Tadesse with how to make *mitmita*, a traditional and highly popular spice blend used in Ethiopian cuisine

#### **D. Project Resources**

As stated above, the Walters Art Museum is uniquely suited to plan this project due to successful past experience in exhibiting Ethiopian art and our exceptional collections. Over the past twenty-five years, the Walters has assembled a substantial collection of objects from Ethiopia, with representative examples in all media types, including panel and wall painting, illuminated manuscripts, metalwork crosses of varying scales, carved wood sculpture, and coinage. These examples cover the history of Ethiopian art, from the Aksumite coinage of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-century CE, to some of the earliest surviving Ethiopian illuminated Gospel books from the 14<sup>th</sup>-century, through 20<sup>th</sup>-century paintings of the Ethiopian foundation legend of the Queen of Sheba and her encounter with King Solomon.

The collections of the Walters Art Museum span art from across the world and seven millennia, therefore making the museum uniquely positioned to provide in-depth context for works of Ethiopian art from the collection and borrowed from other institutions. Our holdings are particularly rich in medieval and early Renaissance Italian panel painting, ceramics of all kinds, illuminated manuscripts (Ethiopian, Armenian, and Islamic), Nubian and South Arabian sculpture, Coptic textiles and ivories, late Roman coinage, and Indian ivories. Displaying Ethiopian objects alongside examples of these objects would be eye-opening for viewers, since these artworks are rarely shown in proximity to each other in museums.

The Walters maintains a team of experts with experience mounting major international loan exhibitions. Our team includes experienced registrars, art handlers, and conservators. Among our other resources, the Walters has one of the oldest conservation laboratories in the country, and the quality of its technical and conservation research has earned it international recognition. The Department of Conservation, Collections and Technical Research has regularly contributed enriching information to exhibitions, catalogues, journals, and more recently to the Walters website.

## **E. Project History**

*Ethiopia at the Crossroads* will mark a groundbreaking evolution of the interpretation of Ethiopian art and will be the latest in the Walters' prestigious history of Ethiopian exhibitions and publications. In 1993, the Walters Art Museum mounted the groundbreaking exhibition, *African Zion: The Sacred Art of Ethiopia*, which was the first major international loan exhibition to introduce American audiences to the stunning artistic production of one of the world's earliest Christian cultures. This was followed in 1998 by the exhibition, *Art that Heals: The Image as Medicine in Ethiopia*, which examined the history and decoration of Ethiopian healing scrolls. Subsequent to the *African Zion* exhibition, the Walters began to build a collection of Ethiopian art to complement its existing holdings of objects from other Eastern Orthodox Christian cultures. Now, nearly 25 years later, the Walters has amassed one of the finest collections of Ethiopian art outside of the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa and one of the largest in the United States. The collection tells the story of a nation whose rulers and priests expressed their royal ideals and religious beliefs through coinage, painted icons, objects used in communal worship or personal devotion, and luxury copies of religious texts. In 2006-2007, the Walters Art Museum mounted the exhibition, *Angels of Light: Ethiopian Art from the Walters Art Museum*, which traveled to the Birmingham Museum of Art, the Smith College Museum of Art, and the Museum of Biblical Art in New York. The exhibition resulted in national exposure for this impressive collection.

Over the past several years, Dr. Christine Sciacca has traveled to museums and libraries across the US and Europe to research and discuss loans for *Ethiopia at the Crossroads* and to confer on the project content with colleagues in the field. These institutions include: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the J. Paul Getty Museum, the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, The Morgan Library & Museum, and private collections in New York, Baltimore, New Mexico, and London, among others.

Beginning in 2017, Dr. Sciacca began presenting her research for the exhibition at various conferences and invited lectures. She began with a presentation on the Walters collection of Ethiopian art at The Catholic University of America in 2017. In spring 2018, Dr. Sciacca was invited by the Medieval-Renaissance Forum of the Department of History of Art at Yale University to give a talk on the topic of Ethiopian art. She presented the idea of Ethiopia as the cultural crossroads and had the opportunity to elicit invaluable feedback from graduate students and professors who study various fields of art history, from Byzantium, to Coptic Egypt, to Renaissance Italy, all of which the presentation touched upon. The 2018 International Medieval Congress at the University of Leeds presented a series of sessions on the understudied field of medieval Africa. This brought together experts on Ethiopia, Nubia, and Mali to exchange ideas in a collegial forum. Dr. Sciacca presented her ideas for the content and organization of the *Ethiopia at the Crossroads* project and received positive and constructive feedback on its premise, which will help shape it moving forward. Several members of the proposed advisory group for *Ethiopia at the Crossroads* (Dr. Andrea Achi, Dr. Wendy Belcher, and Dr. Verena Krebs) organized or presented papers in these sessions. Dr. Sciacca also recently published a set of uncatalogued Ethiopian illuminated manuscript leaves given to the Walters Art Museum in 2014. Her article, "A 'Painted Litany': Three Ethiopian Sensul Leaves from Gunda Gunde" (*Journal of the Walters Art Museum*, 2017), proposes that these leaves were part of a *sensul*, a type of accordion-fold manuscript that became popular in Ethiopia beginning in the late 15<sup>th</sup>-century through the 18<sup>th</sup>-century. Studying this unusual book type highlights Ethiopia's contribution to global book culture, and its use offers insight into Ethiopian Christian devotion through its objects.

In 2019, the Walters received an NEH Planning Grant, which advanced many elements of the exhibition, including research, development of relationships with Ethiopian institutions/scholars, technical analysis of artworks, and the creation of both scholarly and community advisory committees. In January 2020, Dr. Sciacca travelled to Ethiopia with Karen French, Senior Paintings Conservator at the Walters, for purposes of research, inquiry, and beginning negotiations for loans. Fortunately, the Walters team successfully conducted this travel ahead of the Covid-19 pandemic. In May 2020, a scholarly advisory committee was convened via a virtual platform. After a presentation by Dr. Sciacca on the main themes and goals of the *Ethiopia at the Crossroads* exhibition, committee members were asked to give

brief presentations on the relationship between and impact of Ethiopian culture on their respective area of study. The second half of the meeting was an open discussion of questions raised by the organizers and the committee members. The outcome was that committee members proposed some fascinating objects for inclusion in the exhibition that had not previously been considered, and helped further flesh out the thematic outline of the exhibition. In March 2021 and July 2021, Dr. Sciacca assembled an Ethiopia Community Advisory Committee to provide feedback on the project, including cultural, religious, and political perspectives. Both committees are described in further detail below. We are currently planning on hiring a Research Assistant to aid Dr. Sciacca's preparations for the exhibition. Dr. Sciacca is also preparing to travel to other potential exhibition locations in fall 2021, including Minneapolis, alongside members of the Conservation and Exhibitions staff. As the Walters is the organizing institution for this exhibition, it will be crucial to solidify the relationship with the potential partner institution, to thoroughly review their exhibition space(s) and any challenges it might present for the exhibition objects and didactics, and to address any questions or logistical details they might have.

The involvement of Conservation is key in the development of this exhibition. Research to date includes the work of Karen French, whose evaluations of objects from the *African Zion* exhibition in 1994 initiated our technical studies of Ethiopian materials. She remains interested in the restoration and analysis of Ethiopian painting. In summer 2018, Walters scientist Glenn Gates and an intern from Goucher College employed the museum's in-house x-ray fluorescence (XRF) equipment in order to identify the metals and metal alloys present in the Walters coins from the Aksumite Empire in Ethiopia. At the same time, Dr. Aaron Butts of The Catholic University of America paid several visits to the Walters to identify the ruler portraits and to catalogue the coin types. His findings on the 92 Walters coins will be co-authored with Meseret Oldjira and published either as a book-length study or an article in *The Journal of the Walters Art Museum*. The text will also be released as part of the Walters online collections catalogue, and may also form the basis for an essay in the *Ethiopia at the Crossroads* catalogue and inform didactic materials in the exhibition.

Also in summer 2018, Karen French examined the Walters' Ethiopian illuminated manuscripts dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup>-centuries and Ethiopian panel paintings from the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>-centuries under ultraviolet and infrared light and with X-ray radiation, and completed imaging of the works with Walters Fellow, Hae-Min Park. Additionally, Glenn Gates examined these works with XRF. Through this work, they were able to determine the types of pigments used in Ethiopian paintings throughout this period, a time when Italian artists were working alongside Ethiopian artists at the Ethiopian court. The goal was to determine whether the arrival of European artists had any material impact on local Ethiopian artistic production, in addition to the stylistic and iconographic impact on the panel paintings produced. This project represented a collaboration between Dr. Sciacca, French, Dr. Gates, and Park in preparation for a presentation at the conference, "Migrants: Art, Artists, Materials and Ideas Crossing Borders" at the Hamilton Kerr Institute, University of Cambridge in November 2018. Initial findings suggested that even foreign artists typically used local, Ethiopian materials, but the way those materials were used differed depending on the artist's geographic origin.

Because many of the objects in the exhibition are inherently fragile and have not received recent or any conservation treatment, the Walters in-house conservation department will devote a combined total of approximately one year's work to the project. Over the next year, objects conservators will surface clean metal crosses and coins, and address active corrosion. Paintings conservators will remove surface dirt and later discolored additions as necessary, replace or renew hinging, and address the issue of scattered blooming (whitening) where apparent on the later icons. Book and paper conservators will stabilize flaking paint, repair tears in parchment folios and treat unstable bindings.

The exhibition offers an exciting opportunity to explore the materials and techniques artists and craftspeople used to create Ethiopian art, in addition to preserving the individual artworks. Support from the NEH is crucial for additional conservation efforts for *Ethiopia at the Crossroads*. Analysis undertaken during the 2019 NEH Planning included: wood analysis of painted icons and manuscript covers, imaging of painted icons to reveal painting techniques of Ethiopian painters and Italian painters working in Italy, and metal composition analysis of Aksumite coins and metal crosses. These findings will offer insights

into the traditions of Ethiopian artists and craftsmen, allowing visitors to understand the aspects that make Ethiopian artworks unique from those of neighboring cultures in Africa, Europe, and the Middle East.

### **G. Audience, Marketing, and Promotion**

*Ethiopia at the Crossroads* has significant potential to resonate with audiences across the region. The Baltimore/Washington, DC area is home to the largest Ethiopian diaspora and Ethiopian-American population in the United States. As of 2012, there were approximately 35,000 Ethiopian immigrants in the area of service covered by the Walters Art Museum. The Walters has mounted two major exhibitions over the past 25 years, as previously mentioned, that have focused on Ethiopian art, which were both well-attended by diverse audiences: *African Zion: The Sacred Art of Ethiopia* (1993) and *Art That Heals: The Image as Medicine in Ethiopia* (1998). Given this history of well-attended Ethiopian art exhibitions, the Walters anticipates that *Ethiopia at the Crossroads* will likewise draw and entice audiences.

The Walters Art Museum is located in the Mount Vernon Cultural District in the heart of the City of Baltimore. The history of African-Americans and Africans in the greater Baltimore/DC area is profound, and the impact of their activities on the region are immense. The population of Baltimore City is majority African-American (63.3% as of the 2013 census), and Washington, DC is 49% African-American. Visitor feedback over the past decade has indicated that the African-American museum audience has a great interest in the representation of African history and ancestry in a museum setting, which is also reflected by external museum studies. The Walters has increased efforts to represent its surrounding community in its collection, gallery displays, and programming. In 2012, the Walters Art Museum presented the exhibition, *Revealing the African Presence in Renaissance Europe* (the recipient of a Planning Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities). This exhibition was received positively by the press, the scholarly community, and the public alike and was attended by over 17,000 visitors in 14 weeks. The exhibition traveled to the Princeton University Art Museum, and the exhibition catalogue is in its third reprinting. Therefore, we anticipate that the presentation of an exhibition focused on the art of Ethiopia would greatly appeal to the Walters core local community. We anticipate that the exhibition will travel to (b) (6). The Minneapolis/St. Paul area also has the second largest Ethiopian population in the United States along with the largest immigrant population from neighboring Somalia, making it an excellent fit for this exhibition.

The Walters has convened a Community Advisory Group to provide input on *Ethiopia at the Crossroads* and provide vital local and cultural perspectives. Facilitated by museums consultant Dr. Melissa Forstrom, a group of ten individuals from the Baltimore/DC Ethiopian community have gathered twice in 2021 as an Advisory Group for the exhibition. These community, business, and church leaders have provided invaluable insights into the core concepts of the exhibition and the way in which they would like Ethiopia and the Ethiopia diaspora community to be represented. For example, in a discussion of how the museum can reverently display Ethiopian Christian icons, they emphasized that some of the icons should be draped with a veil, thus prompting one of our intended gallery enhancements mentioned above and in the Walkthrough. They have also helped guide our approach to contemporary Ethiopian politics, including the conflict currently taking place in the Tigray region, and how we can authentically celebrate Ethiopian history and culture, especially at this time. We plan to continue convening both the scholarly and community advisory groups during this grant period, ahead of the exhibition opening. Additionally, several private collectors of Ethiopian art have been identified in the Baltimore/DC area. These individuals will be pursued as lenders to the exhibition and possible donors.

The Walters' Marketing and Communications team will serve a key role in supporting and promoting the exhibition. They will create an awareness campaign that includes broad and targeted media relations, printed materials to be distributed on-site and via USPS (brochures, Members Magazines), paid advertising (print, radio, digital), digital marketing (web content, email marketing, social media to include photography and video storytelling), banners, and on-site signage to promote the installations and related programs to a broad audience. With a particular appeal to east African communities, our team will partner with relevant organizations to help disseminate information about the exhibition through their social networks. Recently, the Walters has had success with its 1 West Mount Vernon Place project, which

includes contemporary art that explores themes of race and identity, community art installations, an interactive app, and different types of interpretives. Traditional and new visitors alike have appreciated the model of integrating historic collections with contemporary works to promote relevancy in Baltimore and for Baltimoreans. We plan to incorporate the successes with the installation, programming, and promotion of recent major exhibitions into the plans for *Ethiopia at the Crossroads*.

## **H. Evaluation of the Project's Impact**

The Walters regularly conducts visitor surveys to evaluate its exhibitions and programs. To most effectively gather quantitative and qualitative feedback about the exhibition, the Walters will utilize the expertise of our newly formed Evaluation and Audience Impact Unit, the expertise of Dr. Melissa Forstrom, as well as collect feedback from our Ethiopia Scholarly Advisory Committee and Community Advisory Group.

Ahead of the exhibition, these advisory groups provide crucial feedback on exhibition content, such as the themes, object checklist, exhibition title, and design aspects such as color and look and feel of the exhibition. Due to the broad geographic and chronological scope of the exhibition, experts from various scholarly fields that make up the Scholarly Advisory Committee have been instrumental in thinking through the impact of Ethiopia on their respective areas of study. The Community Advisory Group represents the many facets of Ethiopian culture (they include Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, Ethiopian Muslims, and Ethiopian Protestants), as well as the Ethiopian diaspora in the US. Their responses are crucial for ensuring an accurate and respectful representation of Ethiopian culture in the galleries.

A thorough evaluation of *Ethiopia at the Crossroads* will be conducted by the Walters' new dedicated evaluation unit. This team, led by the Manager of Evaluation and Audience Impact, will develop a plan for collecting pre- and post-exhibition feedback from the general public, in addition to supporting Dr. Sciacca's work with the advisory groups. Once the exhibition is opened to the public, a comprehensive evaluation will examine visitation and visitor input. We aim to collect a combination of quantitative feedback and qualitative feedback. We would like to answer the following questions:

- Who is visiting the exhibition and why?
- Did visitors learn about Ethiopian history and culture through the exhibition?
- Did the exhibition resonate with their lives today?
- What interactive elements helped connect visitors with the material?

Initial visitor outcomes include:

- Visitors will gain knowledge of cultural impact of Ethiopia on the broader world
- Visitors will examine past traditions and make connections to today's world through the work of Contemporary Ethiopian artists
- Visitors will engage in close looking to discover details of craftsmanship

As part of the Walters' standard practice, evaluation results are analyzed and incorporated into future projects. For example, *Ethiopia at the Crossroads* will incorporate feedback gathered from the Walters' recently reinstalled historic 1 West Mount Vernon Place galleries and major visitor survey. As well, we anticipate the forthcoming reinstallation of Arts of the Asian continent, which is deploying front-end public input, community advisory groups, and interactive elements, will provide valuable learning for our exhibitions teams and this project.

## **I. Organizational profile**

*Mission Statement:* The Walters Art Museum brings art and people together for enjoyment, discovery, and learning. We create a place where people of every background can be touched by art. We engage and strengthen our community by collecting, preserving, and interpreting art.

Since 1934, the Walters Art Museum has been an anchor institution in the cultural life of the greater Baltimore region. It maintains an internationally renowned collection of world art from antiquity

to the 21<sup>st</sup>-century that is “for the benefit of the public.” The museum’s collection now comprises more than 36,000 works of art spanning over 70 centuries and from all over the globe. The museum is an urban institution consisting of four distinct, conjoined buildings located in the historic Mount Vernon District in downtown Baltimore. The museum is open to the public Wednesday through Sunday from 10 a.m.–5 p.m. and until 8 p.m. on Thursday evenings; school tours and early childhood programs are also offered on Tuesdays. Access to the permanent collection has been free since 2006. Our special exhibitions became free in 2015, catalyzed by the Walters’ dedication to ensuring broad public access for *Pearls on a String: Artists, Patrons, and Poets at the Great Islamic Courts*, a recipient of an NEH Implementation Grant. The Walters is also a leader in digitization, releasing high-resolution, digital images of collection objects into the public domain for any use, free of charge, on the Works of Art website and award-winning manuscripts website, *Walters Ex Libris*. Visitor surveys in 2019/2020 indicate that since free admission, visitors are more diverse and younger than before.

The Walters attracts a diverse range of audiences and provides programming and services for a variety of populations from toddlers to scholars. Annually, we serve over 150,000 visitors, and approximately 60,000 individuals participate in on-site education programs, grounded in the humanities and in art. Each year, the Walters serves 25,000+ students and teachers from Maryland through curriculum-based programs aligned with the Common Core Standards. The Walters partners with schools from throughout the city and the state on arts integration programs for the preK-12 population. The Walters offers a robust schedule of community programs for all ages, including lectures, tours, festivals, and workshops. Additionally, more than 10,000 visitors annually observe conservators who are preserving and restoring works of art at the Conservation Window. The Walters’ impact extends far beyond the borders of the museum. Our website is renowned for offering free access to artworks to people around the world and is visited over 2 million times a year. Under the circumstances of the Covid pandemic, Walters’ programs shifted to the virtual realm, and over 100,000 users engaged with digital programs in FY21.

## **J. Project team**

The Walters has a history of successfully implementing federal grant awards and has allocated a considerable amount of time on the part of its experienced and qualified staff to execute this project. **Dr. Christine Sciacca**, Curator of European Art, 300-1400 CE, will curate *Ethiopia at the Crossroads*. Her work will be aided and overseen by **Dr. Julia Marciari-Alexander**, Andrea B. and John H. Laporte Director. **Julie Lauffenburger**, The Dorothy Wagner Wallis Director of Conservation, Collections, and Technical Research, will direct the work of both the installations and conservation teams as they prepare for installation. The Conservation department will play an important role in conserving, preparing, and analyzing Ethiopian artworks; this work will be led by **Karen French and Abigail Quandt**, Head of Conservation, Books & Paper. **Connie McAllister**, Director of Marketing and Communications, will oversee communications about the project and will lead a team of public relations, graphic design, and social media professionals.

Managers within the Learning and Community Engagement Department and Visitor Experiences Department are designing and will implement the proposed programs and resources. The addition of a new Accessibility Advocate position in FY21 will help ensure that universal and accessible designs are used in the exhibition. Key members of the conservation staff will contribute to the project through object conservation, analysis, and technical studies. Museum staff and external scholarly and community advisory councils are collaborating to bring their expertise to the exhibition, publication, and associated public programs. In addition to staff named above, the exhibition project team will include:

- Mary Cochran, Associate Registrar
- Angela Elliott, Head of Objects Conservation
- Glenn Gates, Conservation Scientist, Conservation and Technical Research
- Kirsten MacKenzie, Head of Exhibition and Installation Planning
- Ruth Bowler, Director of Publication and Digital Production
- Mike Mckee, Head of Installation and Production

- Sam Mera-Cadedo, Exhibition Designer
- Laurel Miller, Director of Visitor Experience
- Jenn Harr, Head of Collections Management, Installations & Collections
- Director of Learning & Community Engagement (TBD)
- Joy Davis, Manager of Community Partnerships

### **K) Humanities scholars and consultants**

We intend to hire a guest curator (TBD) before the start of the grant period to identify and coordinate contemporary art for the exhibition by Ethiopian and Ethiopian diaspora artists. Were we to be awarded this grant, it would afford us the ability to recruit (b) (6) an Ethiopian curator now working in Maryland. (b) (6)

(b) (6) expertise in contemporary Ethiopian art would strengthen the exhibition and the project team.

With the exhibition's focus on the relationships established between Ethiopia and neighboring cultures, the project will greatly benefit from the input of experts not just in the area of Ethiopian studies, but also in those cultures with which Ethiopia came into significant contact during its history:

**Dr. Andrea M. Achi** is an Assistant Curator in the Department of Medieval Art and The Cloisters at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. She received her Ph.D. in Art History at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University with a dissertation on the manuscripts from the Monastery of St. Michael in Egypt. She was co-curator of the Met exhibition, Arts and Peoples of the Kharga Oasis. Her knowledge of Coptic artistic production and its close relationship with that of Ethiopia will be an invaluable resource.

**Dr. Takele Merid Afessa** is the Director of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies of Addis Ababa University. He worked as a researcher of Heritage Expert for the Federal Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Ethiopia before graduating from Addis Ababa University with a Ph.D. Degree in Social Anthropology in 2016. He has worked at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies of Addis Ababa University as a researcher since 2008.

**Dr. Abba Daniel Assefa** is an Associate at the Ethiopian Orthodox Tawahedo Church Patriarchate Library in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

**Dr. Wendy Laura Belcher** is a Professor in the Department of Comparative Literature and the Department of African American Studies at Princeton University. Her recent work has focused on the early Modern period in Ethiopia, covering the Jesuit accounts of travels to Ethiopia, as well as the first biography of a female Ethiopian saint, Our Mother Walatta Petros, written by an Ethiopian author. Her current translation project with Michael Kleiner is on the seminal medieval Ethiopian foundation text, the *Kebra Nagast*, which describes the meeting of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon. Her knowledge and critical analysis of Ethiopic literature will greatly enrich the humanities content of the exhibition.

**Dr. Solange Ashby Bumbaugh** is an Adjunct Instructor in the Department of Philosophy and Religion at American University. She holds a Ph.D. in Egyptology from the University of Chicago, and her research focuses on the religious culture of Nubia, which along with neighboring Ethiopia was one of the early Christian kingdoms in Africa. She has conducted research in Egypt and excavated at the royal cemetery of El-Kurru in Sudan. Her knowledge of ancient Nubia and its relationship to Ethiopia will fill the understudied area of Ethiopia's relationship to the African subcontinent.

**Dr. Aaron M. Butts** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Semitic and Egyptian Languages and Literatures at The Catholic University of America. His research focuses on Christianity in the Near East, and he teaches courses in Ethiopic (Ge'ez), Syriac, and Arabic. The Catholic University houses the Fr. Albert Jamme collection of South Arabian inscriptions in stone, and Dr. Butts's knowledge of the strong linguistic and cultural connections between South Arabia and Ethiopia demonstrated by these materials will be an asset to the project. He was also instrumental in securing the recent gift of the Gerald and Barbara Weiner Collection of approximately 700 Ethiopian Christian and Islamic manuscripts. Dr. Butts has recently been assisting with cataloguing the Walters collection of ancient Aksumite coins.

**Dr. Helen C. Evans** is Curator Emerita at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. She has curated three major groundbreaking Byzantine exhibitions at the Museum: *The Glory of Byzantium* (1997), *Byzantium: Faith and Power* (2004) and *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition* (2012), each of which discussed the connections between Byzantine art and its surrounding cultures, including that of Ethiopia. Most recently, she curated the international loan exhibition and catalogue, *Armenia: Art, Religion, and Trade in the Middle Ages* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2018), which explores the history of medieval art in Armenia and its dissemination through the trade routes it established through Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.

**Dr. Jan-Lodewijk Grootaers** is Curator of African Art and the Arts of Africa and the Americas Department Head at the Minneapolis Institute of Art. He is a scholar of the arts of Central Africa and the art and architecture of Islamic Africa. He was the curator of the 2007 exhibition, *Ubangi: Art and Cultures from the African Heartland*, and re-installed the African collection at MIA in 2013. Minneapolis is home to the second largest Ethiopian diaspora population in America, and MIA has demonstrated a strong commitment to outreach to their local community. Dr. Sciacca has already consulted with Dr. Grootaers, and they are currently exploring a potential partnership (b) (6) on the *Ethiopia at the Crossroads* exhibition. If agreed upon, (b) (6)

**Dr. Verena B. Krebs** is a W1 Professor for Medieval Cultural Realms and Their Entanglements at Ruhr-Universität, Bochum. She received her Ph.D., a binational degree, from the University of Konstanz, Germany and Mekelle University in Ethiopia. Her forthcoming book addresses the rich cultural exchange between Ethiopia and Europe from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup>-centuries. She completed post-doctoral research at Hebrew University in Jerusalem on the topic of the role of Christian and Muslim royal women in the Horn of Africa from 1300-1650. Her approach is cross-disciplinary, incorporating cultural history, art history, and literature. Her newest project examines trade networks for gold and ivory established between Africa, the Mediterranean, and Europe, and it will be crucial for understanding the materials used in Ethiopian art brought from outside Africa to the Ethiopian court and churches.

**Dr. Getachew Metaferia** is a Professor of Political Science at Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland. His publications have examined the Ethiopian diaspora to the United States. In 2018, he served as Fulbright Senior Scholar in the Department of Middle Eastern and African History at Tel Aviv University, where his research focused on the Beta Israel community of Ethiopian Jews. As a long-time professor at a Historically Black College and University (HBCU), he will also provide important insights into the Baltimore Ethiopian and African-American academic community. Morgan State University is also a Strategic Partner of the Walters Art Museum.

**Dr. Sana Mirza** is the Manager of Scholarly Programs and Publications at the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery in Washington, DC. She received her Ph.D. in Art History at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. She is a contributor to the exhibition publication, *The Art of the Qur'an: Treasures from the Museums of Turkish and Islamic Arts*. Her current research examines the understudied but rich topic of Islamic manuscripts from Ethiopia, and her input would broaden our understanding of Ethiopian book production. In her eleven years at the Freer|Sackler, she has worked in the area of community outreach, and with her colleagues she has developed best practices for gathering audience feedback. This experience would be invaluable for formulating evaluation techniques for the exhibition.

**Dr. Kristen Windmuller-Luna** is the Curator of African Art at the Cleveland Museum of Art. Her Ph.D. thesis from Princeton University focused on Ethiopian art and architecture during the Jesuit period from the mid-16th to the mid-17th-century. She was formerly the Sills Family Consulting Curator for African Arts at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, where she curated *African Arts—Global Conversations*, and the Mellon Collections Research Specialist for African Arts at the Princeton University Art Museum, where she curated the 2018 installation *Changing the Conversation: African Interventions*. With her interest in cross-cultural exchange, her knowledge of the early Modern period in Ethiopia, and her familiarity with the Ethiopian art collections in the New York Metropolitan Area and in Ethiopia, she would be an invaluable resource for developing the exhibition content.



# THE WALTERS ART MUSEUM

## Work plan – *Ethiopia at the Crossroads* (Grant period: May 1, 2022 – April 30, 2024)

### May-August 2022

- Final checklist completed and approved (Curator/Installations team)
- Convene scholarly Advisory Committee to discuss final catalogue essay content (Curator)
- Final essays and photography for publication due (Curator/Scholars/Publications team)
- Final loan letters sent out (Curator/Registrars)
- Images selected for exhibition, marketing (Exhibition team/Marketing)
- Involve Community Advisory Group on reviewing final themes and content and ongoing outreach to target Ethiopian community (Curator/Community Engagement/Consultant)
- Engage Contemporary Art guest curator (Curator/Exhibition Team/HR)
- Image permissions acquired for publication (Publications)
- Finalize script and plan for audio-video elements (Curator/Digital Production team)
- Conservation treatment of selected objects continues (Conservation)

### September 2022-February 2023

- Finalize contemporary artist loans and agreements (Curator/Guest Curator/Installations/Registrars)
- Design team meets to discuss design development and guidelines, including installation layout, case designs with consideration of lender requirements and alarms, and typographic treatments (Curator/Exhibition Team/Marketing/Installations)
- Involve Community Advisory Group on reviewing final designs and ongoing outreach to target Ethiopian community (Curator/Community Engagement/Consultant)
- Convene scholarly Advisory Committee to discuss final designs (Curator)
- Publication copyedited, finalized, and goes to print (Curator/Publications team)
- Create lighting plan and purchase necessary supplies (Installations)
- Security reviews designs and personnel requirements, cameras, etc. (Security/Exhibition Team)

### March 2023-April 2023

- Presentation of updates from Ethiopia exhibition team to larger cross-divisional museum staff (Curator)
- Preparation of articles and materials for marketing, including magazine and print materials (Marketing)
- Planning for exhibition-related public programs (Exhibition Team/Learning & Community Programs/Visitor Experience Team)
- 3D and 2D installation designs are finalized and detailed complete with final floor plan, demo/build plan, paint schedule, case drawings (Designers/Curator)
- Finalize evaluation and longitudinal study plan, including any additional front-end surveys (Curator/Evaluation)
- Alignment of school related content to exhibition and state curricula (School Programs team)

### May 2023-August 2023

- Installation of exhibition begins (Installations/Registrar/Exhibition Team)
- Fabrication of cases and fixtures (Installations)
- Curator and Guest Curator write in-gallery exhibition texts (Curator/Guest Curator)

- Involve Community Advisory Group on reviewing final exhibition texts and ongoing outreach to target Ethiopian community (Curator/Community Engagement/Consultant)
- Convene scholarly Advisory Committee to review final exhibition texts (Curator)
- All written exhibition material to Graphics for production (Installations)
- All audio/video components finalized (Digital Production team)
- Marketing campaign begins, including advertising, website, press, and banners (Marketing)
- Loans arrive (Registrar/Installations)
- Conservation to mat and frame manuscripts; create manuscript cradles as needed for loans (Conservation)
- Planning and preparations for exhibition events, including press preview, opening day programs, donor events, public programs (Learning/Visitor Experience/Marketing/Development)
- Publication delivered (Publications)
- Finalizing contracts for public programming, order supplies/materials (Learning/Visitor Experience)

### **September 2023 – January 2024**

- **September 24, 2023: Public Opening (estimated)**
- Final installation of artworks and gallery enhancements, including audio/visual components and interactives (Installations/Exhibition)
- Security and staff tours conducted ahead of opening; docent training (Curator/Learning/Visitor Experience)
- Press preview held 1 week ahead of opening (Marketing)
- Preview hours for museum supporters (1 day before)
- Opening day talk and tours offered
- Visitor Experience staff coordinate Festival and other onsite learning and art-making
- School Programs staff coordinate school and teacher programs
- Public Programs staff conducts lectures, performances, artists, and related programs
- Community Engagement conducts programs with community groups
- Marketing Campaign Continued
- Museum-wide check-in meetings: 1 week, 1 month, 2 months after opening; address any identified issues
- Conduct on-going evaluations, visitor tracking studies, pop-up surveys, post-program evaluations, and track metrics (Evaluation & Impact team)
- Interview Community Advisory Group for targeted exhibition feedback from the Ethiopian community (Curator/Community Engagement/Consultant)
- Develop and conduct programmatic evaluation. Conduct remedial evaluation of installations and interpretives with Evaluation and Audience Impact Unit and Project Team
- Exhibition to close in January 2024 (exact date TBD)

### **February 2024-April 2024**

- Deinstallation of exhibition at Walters and travel to second venue (Installations/Registrars)
- Museum-wide post-exhibition evaluation (Visitor Experience/Curator)
- Education Team continues to produce programs. Evaluation of programs continue as well (Learning & Community Engagement)
- Community Programs team continues community engagement (Learning & Community Engagement)

## NEH Walkthrough - *Ethiopia at the Crossroads*

Opening to the public at the Walters Art Museum in Fall 2023, *Ethiopia at the Crossroads* (working title) will immerse visitors in the rich and ancient cultural heritage of Ethiopia. Ethiopia's history and importance is legendary. Ethiopia was the second nation to adopt Christianity, predating its adoption in the Roman Empire. Ethiopia's location in the Horn of Africa placed it as the nexus of travel and trade routes throughout its history. And, notably, it was the only African country that was never colonized. This exhibition will examine the relationship between Ethiopia and the various cultures with which it came into contact throughout its thousands of years of history. The Walters collection will be the springboard to demonstrate the impact of Ethiopian art across the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, crossing the Indian Ocean, and also within the African continent. Visitors will learn that Ethiopian culture was not isolated, but that it regularly interacted with the surrounding world, trading ideas and objects through vibrant networks of exchange.

The *Ethiopia at the Crossroads* exhibition will be installed in the Walters Art Museum's first-floor special exhibition galleries, directly opposite the main public entrance of the museum. **This landmark exhibition will be offered entirely for free for all visitors.** The first objects presented to visitors will embody the broad geographic and temporal range of the exhibition—from Ethiopia to the destination countries of the Ethiopian diaspora, and from historic objects dating back to the 3<sup>rd</sup>-century CE to the work of Ethiopian contemporary artists. The exhibition contains approximately 200 objects that include: painted Christian icons, church wall paintings, illuminated manuscripts, healing scrolls, metalwork crosses of various scales, coins, colorful Islamic basketry, and ancient stone and 20th-century wood sculpture. While the exhibition is based on the Walters global permanent collection, there will be approximately 20 significant loans from institutions in Ethiopia, as well as approximately 30 from public and private collections in the US and Europe. Throughout the galleries, visitors will be engaged by historic and contemporary art, as well as several interactive elements integrated into the display. Video screens will show a modern-day religious celebration in Ethiopia, the scent of incense will enthrall the senses, and listening stations with recordings of artists and community members are some of the ways the exhibition will invite visitors to draw connections and have a greater understanding of Ethiopian culture. A full description of gallery enhancements is detailed below.

### **Exhibition Organization**

*Ethiopia at the Crossroads* will be presented in a combined chronological and thematic way to encourage visitors' understanding of pivotal cultural moments in Ethiopian history. Those unfamiliar with the history, culture, and landscape of Ethiopia and Eritrea will encounter various objects and images that will bring this region of the Horn of Africa to life. This exhibition was shaped and informed by work done during the period of the NEH Exhibition Planning Grant. It allowed for the Walters curator, Dr. Christine Sciacca, and conservator, Karen French, to travel to Ethiopia to experience firsthand the country's long history from Lucy (*Australopithecus afarensis*) to the mythic Queen of Sheba, from the Aksumite kings to the rock-cut churches of Lalibela, and up to the present day religious ceremonies, music, and contemporary art. This experience has infused the look and feel of the exhibition, the exhibition content and organization, as well as the programming. The exhibition has been expanded in scope to include art produced in or imported into Ethiopia prior to the Aksumite period (beginning in the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE) to present the ancient, pre-medieval history of the country. The colorful Ethiopian Orthodox Christian ceremonies also influenced the decision to employ a bright, primary palette for the wall colors and design elements in the exhibition galleries. Input from the Ethiopian community of the Washington DC, Maryland, and Virginia area, has helped insure an accurate and respectful representation of Ethiopian culture, and the NEH Advisory Committee composed of scholars in the field of Ethiopian studies, as well as Nubian, South Arabian, Byzantine, Armenian, and Jesuit studies, has shaped content of the exhibition with its broad geographic and chronological scope. A special feature of this exhibition is the conservation work and scientific analysis that was undertaken on the Walters Ethiopian art collection. Ethiopian artists'

materials and techniques are very little studied, and this exhibition will offer rare insights into these two aspects, which are often of great interest to visitors.

Contemporary art will play a pivotal role in this exhibition. Work by contemporary artists, particularly artists of Ethiopian heritage, will be integrated throughout the space and juxtaposed with the historic works. Their voices will help visitors comprehend and connect with the multiplicity of cultures and histories presented. This is exemplified by the gallery entrance, where visitors will see a large canvas by Ethiopian diaspora artist, Julie Mehretu, that will occupy the entirety of the entrance wall. This painting, *Empirical Construction, Istanbul*, is a monumental and immersive piece, 15 feet in diameter and 10 feet high, addressing the idea of places that are crossroads (in the case of this painting, Istanbul). The artist’s abstract, vortex-like arrangement of line conveys the idea of motion and the mobility of people, which is the mechanism by which Ethiopians historically interacted with and had an impact upon the various cultures that surrounded it. The adjacent wall to the left will display the introductory text along with a large 18<sup>th</sup>-century church wall painting of the Last Supper. Christ and his Apostles are depicted as Africans, demonstrating the way in which Ethiopian artists conveyed the centuries-long history of Christianity in this region of Africa by depicting the figures in their own image.



Julie Mehretu, *Empirical Construction, Istanbul*, 2003, acrylic and ink on canvas, Museum of Modern Art, New York



Ethiopian, *The Last Supper*, 18th c., tempera on cotton or linen mounted on panel, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

As visitors travel through the gallery space, they will experience the exhibition main points as follows:

**Section 1: Introduction - Origins, Diversity, and Multiplicity** - While the focus of the exhibition is to approach Ethiopian material culture in a fresh and innovative way, many museum visitors are either unfamiliar with the art and culture of Ethiopia, or they may have misconceived or outdated notions of Ethiopia as a country. Therefore, the exhibition begins with a substantial, multi-part introductory section that will explain some of the key humanities concepts that are integral to understanding this region of East Africa. This will include discussions of prehistoric origins, early connections to major religions, and language.

**Example Highlight - Ethiopian Origins: Lucy** It can be argued that the origin of human life itself can be traced back to Ethiopia. The 3.5- million-year-old skeleton of a female early hominin, *Australopithecus afarensis*, one of the first human ancestors to walk upright, was found in northeastern Ethiopia in 1974. She was nicknamed Lucy by the Western paleoanthropologists who found her and is called *Dinkinesh* (translated as: “you are marvelous”) in Amharic. Visitors will gain insight into this important moment in human evolution through the contemporary artist Faith Ringgold’s mixed media work named after the famous *Australopithecus*. This artwork, composed of materials the artist gathered during a trip to Africa, centers Africa, and specifically Ethiopia. This theme mirrors one major goal of the exhibition: to approach the history of the last two millennia from the perspective of



Faith Ringgold, *Lucy: The 3.5 Million Year Old Lady*, 1977, mixed media on wood and fabric, Minneapolis Institute of Art

Ethiopia as the nexus of travel, trade in goods and ideas, and global impact moving outward from its position in the Horn of Africa.

The exhibition begins with an introductory section presenting some of the key aspects of Ethiopian early history and culture as a foundation for visitors unfamiliar with this African nation. There will be a map with Ethiopia at its center and including the surrounding regions from Spain to East Asia in order to orient visitors. To emphasize the chronological arrangement of the exhibition, a timeline will appear in each section of the show that outlines the date range and major events of the section being presented, beginning with humanity's earliest origins. In 1974, a group of anthropologists unearthed a skeleton in Ethiopia belonging to a female early australopithecine hominid that they nicknamed Lucy. A contemporary artwork referencing Lucy will evoke the origins of humankind found in Ethiopia, and its role as the cradle of modern civilization.

A large portion of the historic artistic production in Ethiopia was created to support one of the three Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), all of which have early roots in Ethiopia. Jewish populations inhabited Ethiopia early on in its history, as revealed by the Semitic origins of the Ethiopian language, and the Ethiopian foundation legend of the encounter between the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon. This story was transcribed in the 13<sup>th</sup>-century text, the *Kebrä Nagast*, and was popularly depicted in 20<sup>th</sup>-century paintings. The Jewish community of Beta Israel specializes in creating small-scale ceramic and fabric sculptures to the present day.

**Example Highlight - Ethiopian Origins: Makeda, The Queen of Sheba** The text known as the *Kebrä Nägäst* (*The Glory of the Kings*), relates one of Ethiopia's primary foundation stories. It relates the narrative of the travels of Makeda, known outside Ethiopia as the Queen of Sheba, to visit the court of King Solomon, whose storied wisdom she wanted to experience first-hand (c. 10<sup>th</sup>-c. BCE). This engaging account, written down in Classical Ethiopic language in the 13<sup>th</sup>-century, but likely transmitted orally and in Arabic prior to then, was passed down through generations and inspired 20<sup>th</sup>-century renditions in various visual media. Canvas paintings featuring a sequence of scenes from the story arranged in successive squares were popular in the Ethiopian tourist market. The saturated colors and dramatic narrative depicted in the example from the Walters Art Museum set the stage for the centrality of storytelling and the vibrant colors that are major threads that run through the exhibition.

The transition to the next room of the exhibition is marked by engaged rectangular pilasters on the outer walls. For this exhibition, the pilasters will be enlivened with intricate patterns drawn from the pages of Ethiopian illuminated manuscripts. These geometric designs are executed in green, yellow, and red. These colors have great cultural significance, not only because they repeatedly appear in historic Ethiopian manuscript and icon painting, but they are also the colors of the Ethiopian flag. Similarly, as indicated in the exhibition elevations, a small, elongated rectangular motif of green, yellow, and red will appear at the top of each exhibition section and wall text to draw the visitor's eye and to reiterate the importance of these colors in Ethiopian culture.



Ethiopian, *Queen of Sheba and King Solomon conceiving King Menelik I*, 20<sup>th</sup> c., paint on fabric mounted on board, Walters Art Museum

In the early 4<sup>th</sup>-century, two Syriac Greek students named Frumentius and Aedesius were purportedly captured by guards when they docked on the coast of present day Eritrea and taken to King Ezana of Aksum (r. 320s-ca. 360 CE). The regent employed them at his court, and at their encouragement, the king converted to Christianity and declared Ethiopia a Christian nation. Subsequently, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was supplied with priests and a bishop from the Coptic Church of Alexandria in Egypt, thus establishing the exchange of theological and artistic ideas between these two African nations linked by the Nile River and

its tributaries. The northern portion of Ethiopia is known today as the Christian Highlands and is home to numerous historic churches and monasteries established over seventeen centuries.

The first objects that visitors will see in this section are the types that visitors to Ethiopian Orthodox churches encounter. Anchoring the wall will be a pair of monumental wall paintings depicting the Archangels Michael and Raphael that originally decorated and acted as guardian figures for the doors of a church *maqdas*, or the inner sanctuary of an Ethiopian church that only the clergy can enter. These canvas paintings will frame a cast bronze processional cross composed of over one hundred smaller crosses and dressed with textile hangings. The form of the cross is integral to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and large-scale crosses would have been taken out of the church and processed through the streets by priests during religious festivals. The wall behind the cross will be blue with a subtle cloud motif to suggest the cross as seen against the clear Ethiopian sky. Also flanked by the two archangel wall paintings will be a large-scale triptych icon of Mary and Her Son Jesus painted by the only documented Ethiopian artist of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Fre Seyon, who worked at the Ethiopian court of Zar'a Ya'qob (1434-68). Visitors will learn the great religious significance of prayers to and images of the Virgin Mary, which were developed during this period under the patronage of Zar'a Ya'qob.

Ethiopia is home to over eighty different ethnicities and religious groups. Museum colleagues in Ethiopia have been working to produce gallery displays that are inclusive of the many regions and artistic traditions in Ethiopia and Eritrea, and the *Ethiopia at the Crossroads* exhibition aims to mirror this inclusive approach. Many of the groups found in the southern regions of Ethiopia practice non-Abrahamic religions. Konso artists, for example, produced *waaka*, or memorial stelae, placed as grave markers to honor ancestors. These figures represent one facet of Ethiopian sculptural production, connecting it to similar traditions elsewhere on the African continent.

The use of written language in a distinctively Ethiopic alphabet dates to the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE. Classical Ethiopic, also known as Ge'ez, is a Semitic language based on South Arabian, which demonstrates the long history of exchange between these two cultures across the Red Sea. Ge'ez was the spoken and written language used for centuries by Ethiopian rulers and church leaders alike, and it continues to be used in the Ethiopian Orthodox liturgy today. Amharic, the language spoken by the majority of modern-day Ethiopians, is based on Ge'ez and its alphabet. Examples of Ethiopic texts and painted icons with Ge'ez inscriptions will be shown together with the work of contemporary Ethiopian artist, Wosene Kosrof, who incorporates Amharic words into his abstract compositions, emphasizing the integral role of language in Ethiopian art over many centuries.



Konso artist, *Memorial Stela (waaka or waga)*, 19<sup>th</sup> c. or earlier, wood, The Brooklyn Museum

**Section 2: South Arabian Neighbors (1<sup>st</sup>-millennium BCE–2<sup>nd</sup>-c. CE)** – The development of the classical Ethiopic language (Ge'ez) stemmed from the Semitic languages of South Arabia. This relationship between Ethiopia and its neighbors across the Red Sea manifests itself in the exchange of artistic motifs, such as animals and decorative patterns, between South Arabian sculpture and Ethiopian illuminated manuscripts. The port city of Adulis, located in ancient Ethiopia and modern-day Eritrea, was the jumping off point for travel from East Africa across the Red Sea to South Arabia. These travel routes were established early in Ethiopia's history and allowed for the exchange of both goods and language. The display of alabaster reliefs and illuminated manuscripts in this section will be accompanied by a chart illustrating some basic translations from South Arabian to Ge'ez to English (and perhaps also to Amharic for Ethiopian visitors).

**Section 3: The Aksumite Kingdom and the Roman Empire (270–early 7<sup>th</sup>-century CE)** – The earliest surviving objects from Ethiopia are the coins minted by generations of Aksumite rulers. In a new approach to this material, the study of the portraits that appear on these coins will help characterize these rulers' self-fashioning and self-representation. The coinage will also be shown in relation to the late Roman examples that preceded it, and an example of a late Antique Roman-style oil lamp found in Ethiopia will demonstrate the Ethiopian empire's exchange with the Roman Empire. The travel of

Ethiopian coinage across trade networks and their appearance elsewhere in the world reveal the value and impact of the Aksumite kingdom in late antiquity. These coins will be set against the backdrop of a large-scale photograph of the famous Aksumite stelae, monumental obelisks erected as grave markers by the kings of Aksum. The exhibition, *Caravans of Gold: Fragments in Time*, organized by the Block Museum at Northwestern University, employed a unique transparent display case in which the coins appeared to float in the air. This visually appealing approach would be adopted here, so that a wall-sized blow up photograph of an ancient site in Aksum could provide the backdrop for the coins. In addition, on a micro level, small magnifying lenses may be inserted into the display for some of the coins so that visitors can observe the detail and the features of the portraits of the Aksumite kings. We have had success with this in past exhibitions featuring objects with small details.

The NEH Planning Grant awarded to the *Ethiopia at the Crossroads* exhibition has supported technical analysis by Walters conservators and conservation scientists of the Walters Ethiopian works. Objects that have yielded particularly interesting and groundbreaking findings will receive a special label indicating this additional layer of conservation information. Initial analysis of the alloys present in the Walters Ethiopian coins indicates that not all the coins match the standard weights and metal composition of Aksumite coins in other collections. With further study, we may find that some of the Walters coins were produced as far afield as India, and we will document findings in the exhibition and publications.

**Sections 4-7: Relationships with Ancient Christian Cultures (1st c. CE-present)-** This will highlight some of the cross-cultural relationships developed between Ethiopia and other major early Christian cultures. Visitors to the exhibition will first encounter Christianity, the religion which the majority of Ethiopians and Eritreans still practice today. King Ezana of Ethiopia converted to Christianity in the early 4<sup>th</sup>-century and declared it the state religion, making Ethiopia only the second nation to do so after Armenia. Therefore, unlike many other African nations where the arrival of Christianity was the result of colonization, Christianity in Ethiopia was the result of its connection with the Coptic Church of Alexandria, Egypt dating back to the very origins of Christianity itself. On display will be Coptic crosses, illuminated manuscripts, and leather bookbindings, all of which display interlace and patterns that also appear in Ethiopian books and crosses. From the Byzantine empire, icons, illuminated manuscripts, metalwork crosses, and commercial tools such as metal stamps for goods will demonstrate the synergies between Ethiopian and Byzantine art and the exchange between the two concurrent empires. Armenia controlled a vast trading network from Europe and Africa into Asia. As the two earliest Christian nations in the world, Armenia and Ethiopia have religious affinities, as well as similarities in artistic production. The two cultures share a focus on the form of the cross and display related painting styles, which appeared in both icons and illuminated manuscripts, and which are featured in this section. These sections include discussions of:

- Nubia, Ancient Empire and Early Christian Kingdom in Africa (8<sup>th</sup>-c. BCE–4<sup>th</sup>-c. CE)
- Coptic Egypt (1st c. CE-present)
- Byzantium (330-1453 CE)
- Armenia: Early Christians and Traders (4th c. CE-present)

**Section 8: Harar: Holy City in Islam (7th-c. CE-present) -** Islam arrived in Ethiopia during the prophet Muhammad's lifetime (570-632), and it remains the second largest religion in the country. Harar, in eastern Ethiopia, is the source of a robust tradition of producing illuminated copies of Muslim religious texts. New studies of similar pigments used in Islamic and Christian Ethiopian manuscripts may reveal their shared history. Islamic processional standards ('Alam) also share a similar function with Christian processional crosses. The co-existence of these two religions and their artistic products in Ethiopia has never before been fully explored. Also on view will be 20th and 21st century basketry demonstrating the intricate and colorful woven designs characteristic of modern-day craft in Harar.

**Example Highlight - Ethiopia and Islam** Islam arrived in Ethiopia in the first decades after its foundation by the prophet Muhammad. When Muslims fleeing persecution in Mecca arrived in the Ethiopian capital of Aksum in the early 7<sup>th</sup> century CE, the Christian ruler gave them refuge. Today, Islam is the second largest religion in Ethiopia, with one third of the population practicing the faith. As in the Christian culture of Ethiopia, scriptural and liturgical manuscripts and various ceremonial objects are central to the Muslim worship. This section will feature an illuminated copy of the holy book of the Qur'an, on loan from an American private collection, written and illuminated in Harar, the walled city that became the center of Islam in medieval Ethiopia and Islam's Fourth Holiest city. The adjacency of the exhibition sections on Christianity and Islam allows the display of artworks that performed a similar function in both religions. The Islamic processional standard known as the 'alam, typically done in metalwork, is echoed in Ethiopian processional crosses carried by priests on feast days



Ethiopian, *Islamic Standard ('Alam)*, 19th c., bronze, The British Museum

**Section 9: Building a Local Christian Culture (12<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup>-c. CE)** – This period saw a rapid and widespread trend of church building, particularly the famous rock-cut churches of Ethiopia, sanctioned by the kings of the Solomonic dynasty. Various types of crosses and the earliest surviving Ethiopian illuminated manuscripts were also made during this time to be used as integral parts of the Christian liturgy. Featured in this section will be bronze processional crosses executed in various shapes indicative of the region that produced them, along with the earliest illuminated manuscripts that survive from Ethiopia.



Ethiopian, *Folding Processional Icon in the Shape of a Fan*, Late 15th-century, tempera with ink on parchment, wood handles, the Walters Art Museum

**Section 10: Encounters with Europe and the Middle East (1400-1527 CE)** – Ethiopia sent envoys to Italy and Portugal beginning in the early 15<sup>th</sup>-century; subsequently, Italians traveled to Ethiopia, some becoming artists at the Ethiopian court. A tradition of panel painting appeared in Ethiopia from this time, shaped by local traditions of manuscript illumination and wall painting. Ethiopian and Italian artists worked side-by-side, exchanging iconography, painting styles, and materials. Ethiopian priests also traveled to Rome and Jerusalem, and encountered and sought out other Eastern Orthodox Christian clerics from Byzantium and Armenia, among other regions. Artists from Limoges, France produced high quality examples of enamelwork for the Ethiopian market around the year 1500, and some of the surviving objects incorporated Ge'ez inscriptions, or were integrated with Ethiopian-made metalwork pieces. One such diptych that combines Ethiopian and French metalwork will be on view, along with Limoges enamel plaques with biblical scenes from the Walters collection.

**Example Highlight - Encounters with Europe and the Middle East** In the past, the 15th-century dawn of icon painting in Ethiopia was attributed to the arrival of Italian artists and their painting techniques at the Ethiopian court. This ignores the long local history of church wall painting and manuscript illumination in Ethiopia and Eritrea in the prior centuries. In addition, placing examples of the works of Ethiopian and Italian artists side-by-side in the exhibition for the first time reveals that these



painters fed off of each other's approach to painting in a symbiotic way. They exchanged iconography, compositions, painting styles, color palettes, and materials. In the icon, Mary and Her Son Jesus, the Ethiopian artist Fre Seyon (active 1445-1480) incorporated the traditional Italian pose and gesture of the Virgin and Christ, but he includes the figures of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel who guard the central holy figures in Ethiopian painting, and the figures' garments display patterns found in textiles used in Ethiopia. At the same time, Niccolò Brancaleon, a Venetian monk who joined the Ethiopian court as an icon painter around the same time as Fre Seyon, employed the four-color palette typically found in Ethiopian icon paintings, while building up the paint in carefully shaded layers as is typical in Italian Renaissance painting.



(left) Fre Seyon, *Mary and Her Son and Archangels Michael and Gabriel*. Ethiopia, 1445-80, tempera on panel, private collection; (right): Niccolò Brancaleon, *Right Half of a Diptych with the Virgin and Child*, c. 1500, tempera on panel, The Walters Art Museum

**Section 11: The Jesuit Missions (1555–1632 CE)** – The Jesuit missions to convert Ethiopians to Catholicism marked the arrival and Ethiopian adoption of Catholic iconography, including the Santa Maria Maggiore icon of the Virgin and Child, the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception, and the Man of Sorrows (Kwer'atä Reesu). The Ethiopian response to the Jesuit envoys is recorded in the locally-written life of the Ethiopian saint, Our Mother Walatta Petros, who defied Jesuit intervention. During this period, depictions of cowrie shells appear in Ethiopian icons of the Virgin and Child. Found primarily in the Indian Ocean and harvested in many of the island nations ringing the Indian Ocean as well as the Swahili Coast from Somalia to Mozambique, these shells hint at the trade networks that supported Jesuit travels through Ethiopia to the Indian Ocean, which led to their establishment of Christian communities in Goa, India. These interactions in turn fostered artistic links between India and Ethiopia, as revealed through stylistic and iconographic similarities between Sri Lankan ivories and Ethiopian illuminated manuscripts.

**Section 12: Gondar: Ethiopian Kingship Restored (1632-1769 CE)**—After the departure of the Jesuits in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Ethiopian emperors who traced their lineage back to King Solomon re-established their control of Ethiopia. Emperor Fasilides (r. 1632-67) set up a new capital in Gondar, commissioning a castle and several churches in the city. Subsequent royal patrons commissioned illuminated manuscripts and panel paintings from surrounding monasteries, encouraging a great flowering of what became known as the Gondarine artistic style, which lasted well into the 18<sup>th</sup> century. One such royal patron was the empress Mentewwab (r. 1723-30) who founded a church decorated with wall paintings featuring her portrait. At this time, the now well-established Indian Ocean trade routes were utilized for the import of textiles from the East. Ethiopian rulers coveted these foreign-made fabrics for their royal attire, as is reflected in their portraits, and the rich textiles were often incorporated into manuscript bindings.

**Section 13: Conquest and Failed Colonization (1865-1941 CE)**—Ethiopia's relationship with its surrounding cultures was not always friendly and symbiotic. Beginning in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, England, France, and Italy all unsuccessfully attempted to overtake control of Ethiopia. During the British invasion, and after their victory at the Battle of Magdala in 1868, the troops plundered hundreds of Ethiopian cultural artefacts, many of which were brought back to England. Presenting these uncomfortable historical moments will allow for acknowledgement of the provenance of the many Ethiopian artworks found in collections in collections outside Ethiopia, especially in Europe and the United States.

**Example Highlight - Conquest and Failed Colonization (1865-1941)** - Ethiopian churches continued to thrive and were in a constant state of renewal from the 19th into the 20th century. The tradition of producing icons, illuminated manuscripts, and processional and hand crosses for church use continued

throughout this period. International visitors increased in number in the 20th century, fueling the market for tourist art depicting Ethiopia's historic and contemporary culture. This period also represents the moment when outside forces, particularly from Europe, attempted to annex various regions of Africa, including Ethiopia, through colonization. At the Battle at Magdala in 1868, English troops attempted to overtake the Ethiopian King Tewodros, who committed suicide when confronted with defeat; following this, they looted scores of cultural treasures that today reside in English museum and library collections. This raises the important topic of object provenance which many European and American institutions are attempting to address today, and which will be discussed in this section. One subject depicted in popular Ethiopian art was the 1896 Battle at Adwa, when Ethiopian troops defeated invading Italian troops hoping to gain control of the country. It is a great point of pride for the Ethiopian community today that Ethiopia was never colonized.



Ethiopian, *Battle of Adwa*, ca. 1968, oil on canvas, Smithsonian National Museum of African Art

**Section 14: Healing and Divination**—Healing and divination will be highlighted, as they are a major thread that runs through all of the different cultures discussed above. Ethiopian Orthodox Christians in need of physical or spiritual healing sometimes commissioned parchment scrolls decorated with protective images of angels and demons and inscribed with prayers. The earliest surviving Ethiopian healing scrolls date to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, though most are from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. They were produced in Ethiopia at least as early as the 15<sup>th</sup> century, as the emperor Zār'a Ya'eqob (r. 1434-1468) condemned their use as blasphemous. The concept of commissioning objects intended to cure one's problems is a practice found throughout many of the cultures with which Ethiopia came into contact. Examples of Byzantine amuletic scrolls and Armenian and Islamic prayer scrolls, along with late Antique incantation bowls from Syria and later Islamic magic bowls, will be shown side by side with Ethiopian healing scrolls as a window into the universal human desire to heal and thrive. This section will offer a significant way to connect with audiences today, especially as our country and people across the globe are trying to heal from the pandemic and other recent disasters.

**Section 15: Global Ethiopia: Contemporary Ethiopian Artists and Their Historic Roots (20<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup>-c.)** – Contemporary Ethiopian artists have produced dynamic and impactful works over the past several decades, especially in diaspora communities in the United States. The exhibition will focus in particular on contemporary artists who respond to and reflect upon traditional Ethiopian art. Some examples include: paintings by Wosene Kosrof that incorporate the Ge'ez language, Alexander "Skunder" Boghossian's paintings featuring the forms of Ethiopian healing scrolls, and Aida Muluneh's photographic self-portraits that depict her in the fashion of traditional and historical women, such as the Virgin Mary, and in the context of the Ethiopian landscape and architecture.

### **Exhibition Experience: Interactives and Gallery Enhancements**

The exhibition will immerse visitors into the sights, sensations, and multifaceted experiences of Ethiopian history and culture. The exhibition covers approximately 1800 years of Ethiopian history, as well as countries across Africa, Asia, and Europe. Therefore, it is crucial to ground visitors with a map highlighting the major countries and regions covered in the exhibition, ideally highlighting routes of trade and travel across this broad area. A timeline, broken up according to the exhibition section, will appear in each room to give viewers a sense of Ethiopia's long history of interaction with its surrounding cultures. Throughout the galleries, we plan to incorporate multimedia, opportunities for hands-on activities, and sensory elements that give a more holistic view of Ethiopian culture. Visitors will have access to additional levels of information for certain highlight objects in the exhibition beyond the traditional object label. iPads next to key objects will provide broader historical context and conservation findings on these works of art. As exhibition planning progresses, the team will evaluate what digital interpretive will best

fit this project. These interactive elements reflect lessons learned from previous exhibitions at the Walters, best practices at other institutions, and feedback from our advisory committees.

In order to enhance visitors' understanding of a culture with which they might not be familiar, and also to respectfully represent the culture of Ethiopian and Ethiopian-American visitors, we endeavor to evoke the sights, sounds, and scents of Ethiopia throughout the exhibition. The galleries will feature photography of landscapes, architecture, and contemporary Ethiopian people; this will act as a backdrop against which the objects will be shown in order to provide context for visitors. Sources for these images are discussed in the application Narrative. Enlivening the liturgical instruments and written texts will be a recording of Ethiopian Orthodox Church chants playing in the gallery. The sound will be audible as one enters the exhibition space, and this will encourage visitors to continue into the next section of the exhibition. A monitor displaying a video of an Ethiopian Orthodox Church ceremony, such as the ones that take place on the holiday of Timket (the feast of the Epiphany) may also help bring to life the ceremonial objects on display.

In addition, we are considering ways to add scent to the exhibition experience, as it ties significantly to several of the objects on view. Not only will we try to replicate some of the sensations of being in Ethiopian sacred spaces, but the scent of incense is one of the unique characteristics of Ethiopian manuscripts. Ethiopian manuscripts maintain the fragrance of incense to this very day. The Institute for Digital Archaeology in Oxford, UK has been on the cutting edge of developing techniques to convey scents in museum installations. Not only have they devised a method of evoking the complex levels of a particular smell, they have produced a discreet and contained delivery system that ensures that contains the scent distribution so that it does not affect visitors with sensory sensitivities. Their system could be employed in this section to reproduce the smell of incense used during church ceremonies, or the particular scent of Ethiopian parchment used in manuscripts and scrolls. Displayed alongside other objects used in the performance of the Orthodox Christian Liturgy, visitors will have greater understanding of the multi-sensory experience of Ethiopian practices and traditions. To this end, we also intend to incorporate lessons learned from the NEH-funded *A Feast for the Senses* exhibition (2016), where scent and other sensory experiences played a significant role in the gallery experience.

Visitors will be offered a multi-faced experience with a major element of historic Ethiopia: language. While the official language of modern-day Ethiopia is Amharic, an Afro-Asiatic language based on the Ge'ez *fidel*, Classical Ethiopic remains the language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church liturgy. A small writing desk could be set up below an early 20<sup>th</sup>-c. parchment *fidel* teaching scroll that appears in this section. Children and adults could try their hand at writing some Ethiopic letters or their name in Ge'ez, much like youth are still taught at Sunday school today. Nearby, visitors would see how

meaningful language is to Ethiopian culture through the work of contemporary artist, Wosene Kosrof, who incorporates abstracted words in Amharic into his paintings. His piece, *Wax and Gold X*, refers to the Ethiopian concept that everything has a surface meaning (wax), but careful contemplation reveals more significant layers beneath (gold), just as the viewer must decipher the various layers of the artist's painting by first identifying the Amharic words and then unraveling their deeper symbolic meaning.

The Ethiopia Community Advisory Committee at the Walters, funded by the NEH Planning Grant for the exhibition, was consulted about the best way in which to display Ethiopian icons, which are considered the earthly embodiment of the holy figure or figures depicted. Many icons in Ethiopian churches, especially those of Mary, are covered with opaque or translucent cloths to demonstrate reverence for the mother of Jesus. At the Advisory Committee's suggestion, a textile curtain will be drawn back around the frame of the Fre Seyon icon in this section to indicate this practice. We are also considering ways to, quite literally, integrate Committee members' voices into the galleries. By installing "listening stations" in the exhibitions, visitors will encounter the perspectives and experiences of members of the Baltimore/DC Ethiopian communities and Ethiopian diaspora artists. Visitors will be able to hear for themselves how Ethiopian art, culture, and history have an effect on life today.



Wosene Worke Kosrof, *Wax and Gold X*, 2014, acrylic on canvas, Jolene Tritt and Paul Herzog Collection

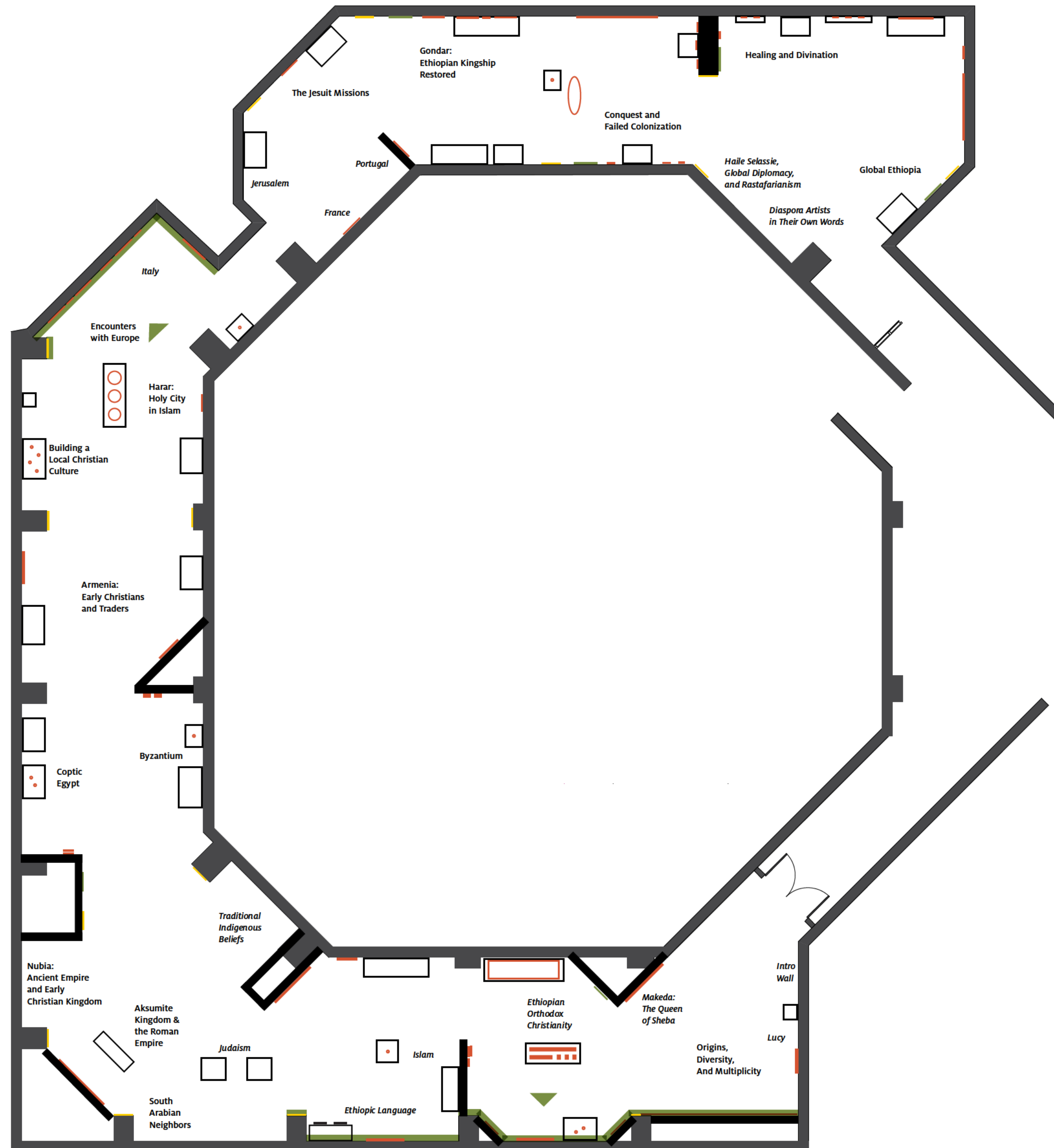
Technical analysis findings will be communicated to visitors as they encounter artworks throughout the exhibition. Objects that have yielded particularly interesting and groundbreaking results will receive a special label indicating the conservation findings. For example, it has long been said that Ethiopian icon painters used wood from the local wanza tree to create their panels, however this theory has never been tested. Analysis of minute samples taken from the Walters Ethiopian icons indicates that a wide variety of locally-sourced woods were used as the support for the paintings, sometimes even different woods within the same multi-paneled painting. These discoveries will help visitors and scholars alike better understand production of Ethiopian artworks and underscore several of the exhibition themes.

### **Public Programs**

The Walters Art Museum will situate the themes of *Ethiopia at the Crossroads* within a broad context of historic and contemporary issues with the aim of not only engaging visitors more deeply but also making the exhibition content relevant to their lives today. The Walters' Learning and Community Engagement and Visitor Experience Departments will strategize, with input from the curator and advisory groups, and create a full suite of offerings related to Ethiopia. Programming will be developed a diverse and intergenerational audience, including individuals of all ages. These offerings will be made available to the public either free of charge or low-cost. Held throughout the duration of the exhibition, these programs will include (but are not limited to): art workshops/demonstrations, musical performances, gallery talks, tours, lectures, foodways explorations, and festivals. A list of potential events is included in the Narrative under Education Resources. For general audiences, as well as scholars, we will plan a symposium that will more deeply explore themes highlighted in *Ethiopia at the Crossroads*. Dr. Sciacca will provide an overview of the exhibition and introduce key themes and historical notes. A question-and-answer session with the audience will follow. We are currently planning to make this a hybrid event, wherein major presentations would be made available to the public, followed by scholars being invited for breakout sessions for in-depth discussions. With contemporary art and diaspora artists playing such a vital role in the exhibition, we expect to create several events that connect our audiences with practicing artists. We plan to produce several events with artists whose work is featured in the exhibition, such as an artist talk with Tsedaye Makonnen, an Ethiopian-American multi-disciplinary artist local to the Baltimore/DC area. These programs will also provide an opportunity to celebrate the work and voices of a broader collection of local artists, whose work would spark an interesting conversation with the art on view.

The Learning and Community Engagement team will produce several ways of connecting with children and families. A major highlight will be a free Community Festival that celebrates Ethiopian art and culture through art-making, performance, and food. Walters festivals typically attract between 1,000-3,000 visitors, and we expect this event to be no less. The museum-wide extravaganza would include concurrent activities, which could include: docent-led tours, multiple art activities for children, performances by Ethiopian artists or dancers, musical performances, and workshops. This event would feature partnerships with local organizations and businesses, such as Ethiopian restaurants, artisans, and cultural centers. On an ongoing basis, the Walters will offer free weekly Drop-in Art activities thematically tied to the exhibition will be conducted in the Walters' Family Art Center on weekends.

School Programs are a vital part of the Walters' education programs, and *Ethiopia at the Crossroads* will provide an excellent means of engaging students with the multiple humanities themes featured in the exhibition. The exhibition will give the regional K-12 community the opportunity to explore key themes featured, such as: the African continent, global trade, comparative religion, language, ancient history, and identity, to name a few. All programs will be aligned with Maryland curricula, particularly for social studies, language arts, and visual arts. School and teacher programs will include field trips with guided tours, studio experiences, virtual resources, homeschool workshops, and teacher events. Students will compare viewpoints from a variety of sources in order to develop an understanding of the historic, social, and cultural values of the medieval period. Guided tours will provide the opportunity for students to look at art, describe the use and effectiveness of multisensory detail, and support their ideas with evidence.

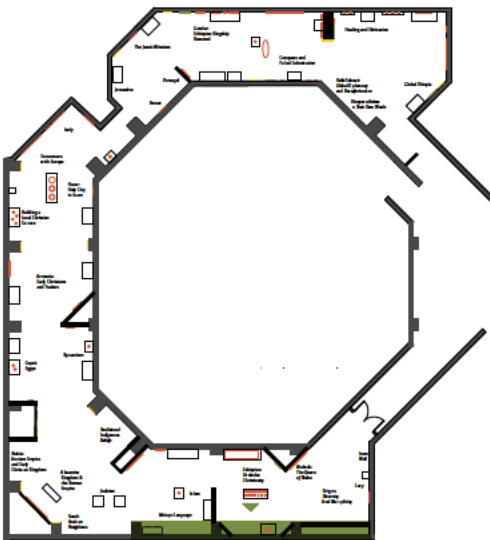


- Sections:
- 1.0 Introduction - Origins, Diversity, and Multiplicity
    - A - Intro Wall
    - B - Lucy
    - C - Makeda: The Queen of Sheba
    - D - Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity
    - E - Islam
    - F - Judaism
    - G - Traditional Indigenous Beliefs
    - H - Ethiopic Language
  - 2.0 South Arabian Neighbors (8th-1st c. BCE)
  - 3.0 The Aksumite Kingdom and the Roman Empire (270-early 7th-century CE)
  - 4.0 Nubia: Ancient Empire and Early Christian Kingdom (8th-c. BCE-4th-c. CE)
  - 5.0 Coptic Egypt (1st c. CE-present)
  - 6.0 Byzantium (330-1453 CE)
  - 7.0 Armenia: Early Christians and Traders (4th c. CE - present)
  - 8.0 Harar: Holy City in Islam (7th-c. CE-present day)
  - 9.0 Building a Local Christian Culture (12th-14th-c. CE)
  - 10.0 Encounters with Europe and the Middle East (1400-1527)
    - A - Italy
    - B - France
    - C - Portugal
    - D - In Jerusalem
  - 11.0 The Jesuit Missions (1555-1632)
  - 12.0 Gondar: Ethiopian Kingship Restored (1632-1769)
  - 13.0 Conquest and Failed Colonization (1865-1941)
  - 14.0 Healing and Divination
  - 15.0 Global Ethiopia
    - A - Haile Selassie, Global Diplomacy, and Rastafarianism
    - B - Diaspora Artists in Their Own Words

- Patterned Ethiopian Graphic Element Separating Sections
- Artwork
- Elevations Included in Design Packet

**Ethiopia: At the Crossroads** *at the Walters Art Museum*

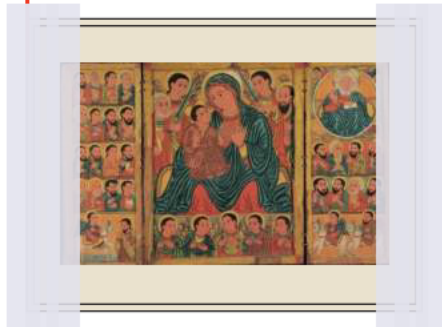
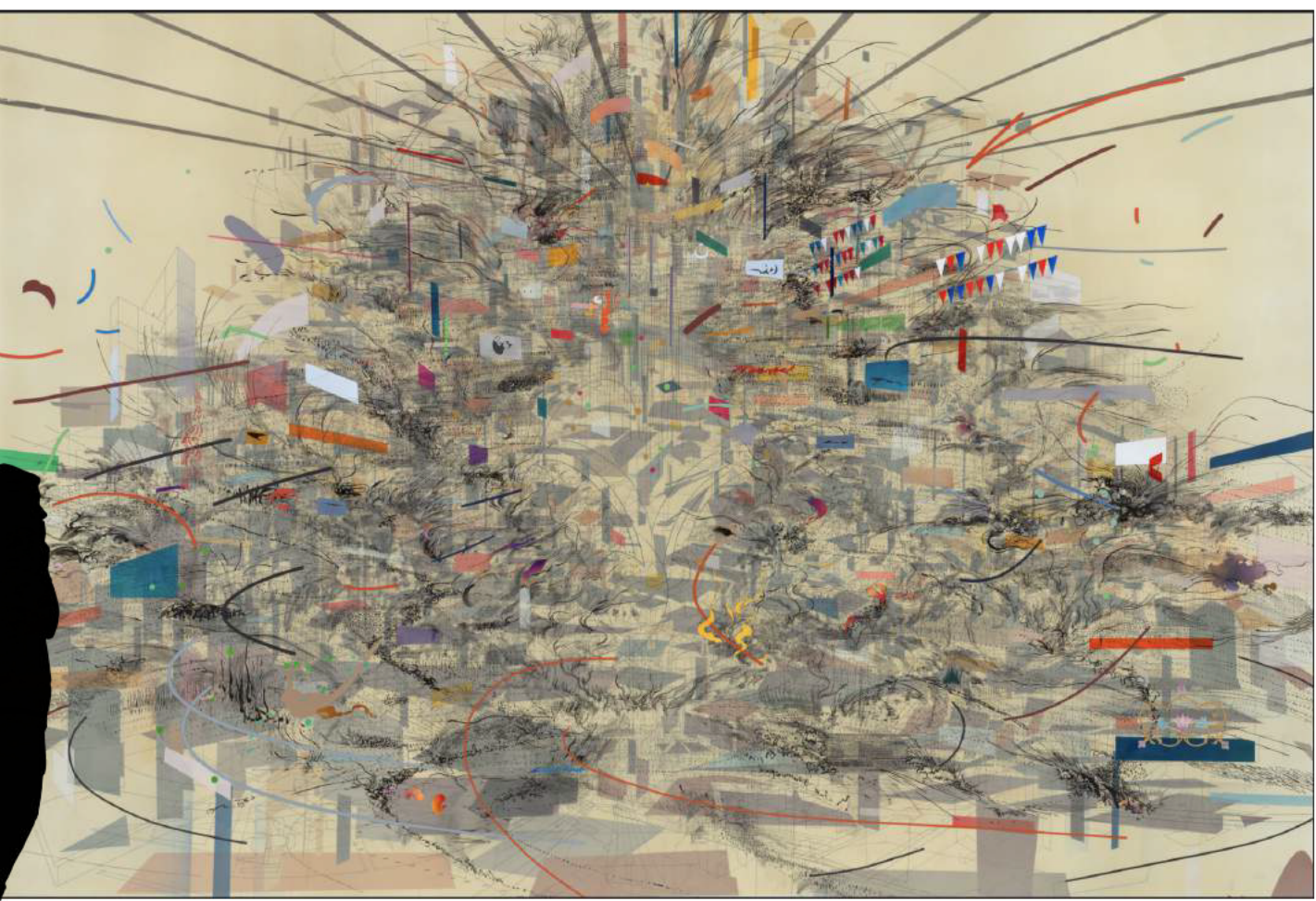
Elevation #1, Sections 1A and 1D  
*Introduction and Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity*



New wall flushed out with column to accommodate *Empirical Construction, Istanbul*

Pattern on column to delineate sections, inspired by patterns in Ethiopian illuminated manuscripts

Curtains to indicate the Ethiopian practice of covering the icons out of respect



Scale: 1/2"=1'

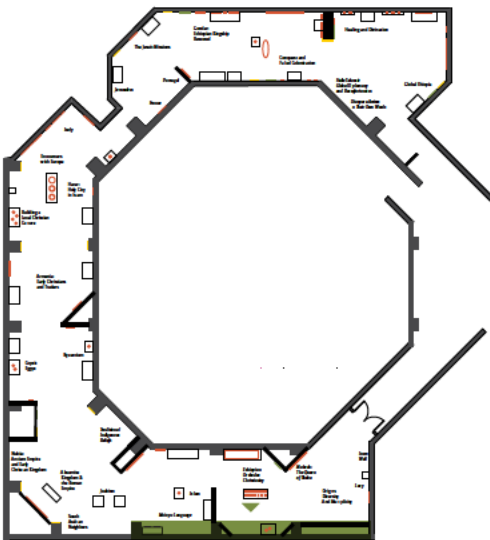
45° wall going from the column to the back of the wall

Subtle cloud motif suggesting the cross as seen against the Ethiopian sky during outdoor processions

45° wall going from the column to the back of the wall

# Ethiopia: At the Crossroads *at the Walters Art Museum*

Elevation #1 cont'd, Section 1H  
*Ethiopic Language*



Juxtaposition of contemporary artwork featuring Amharic language with historic Ge'ez manuscripts

Ethiopic Language Interactive - Learn to write Ge'ez

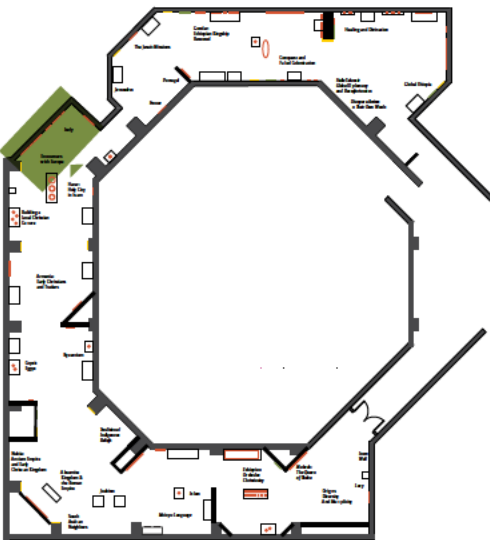


Scale: 1/2"=1'

Pattern on column to delineate sections, inspired by patterns in Ethiopian illuminated manuscripts

# Ethiopia: At the Crossroads *at the Walters Art Museum*

Elevation #2, Section 10A  
*Encounters with Europe and the Middle East (1400-1527) – Italy*



Pattern on column to delineate sections, inspired by patterns in Ethiopian illuminated manuscripts

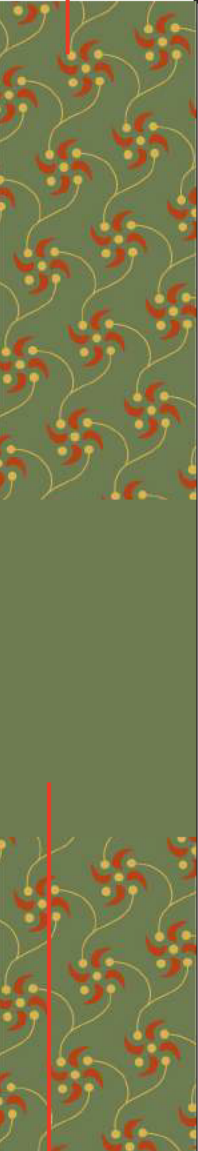
Wall cut-outs resembling Ethiopian church cupboards holding icons

Wall cut-out in shape of window from Ethiopian church

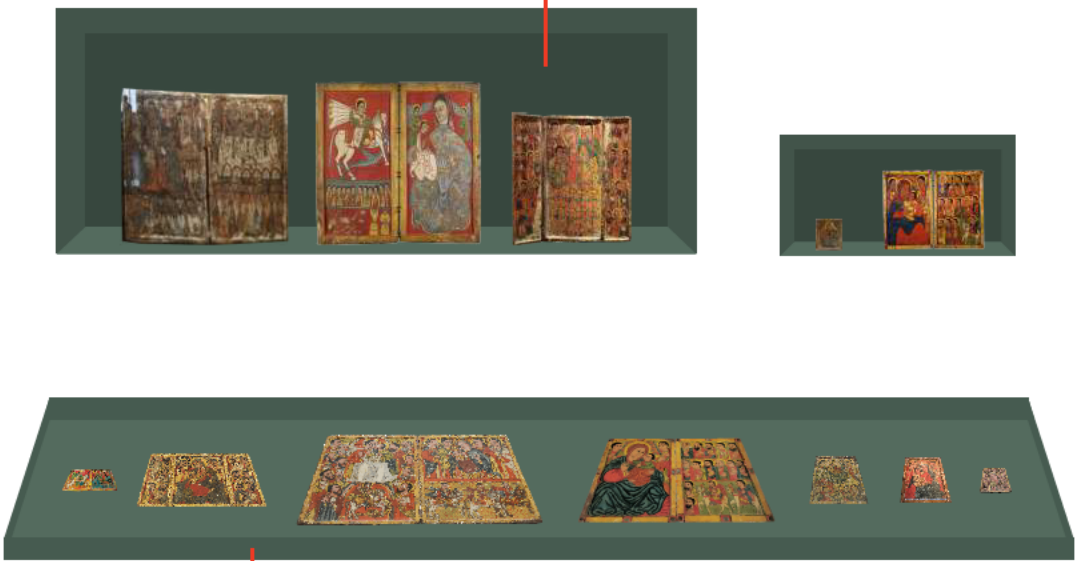
Wall cut-out in shape of window from Renaissance period



Scale: 1/2"=1'



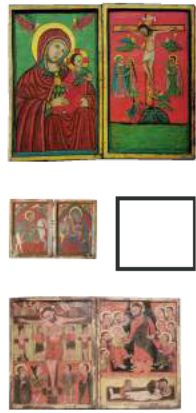
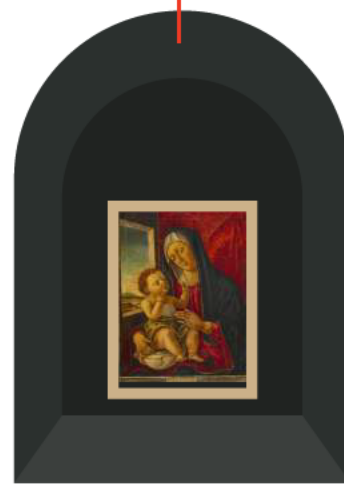
Section introduction wall panel



Wall case with wedge to hold icons that cannot stand due to conservation concerns



Grouping of Ethiopian painters inspired by Italian artwork and techniques



Grouping of Italian painters working in Ethiopia and inspired by Ethiopian artwork and techniques



# Ethiopia: At the Crossroads *at the* Walters Art Museum

## Sample Interpretive Text

### Section Introduction - Wall Panel

#### **Encounters with Europe**

Beginning in the early 15th century, Ethiopia initiated contact with Europe, sending envoys to Italy and Portugal. Subsequently, Italians traveled to Ethiopia, some becoming artists at the Ethiopian court. As a result, a tradition of panel painting appeared in Ethiopia from this time, shaped by existing local traditions of manuscript illumination and wall painting. Ethiopian and Italian artists worked side-by-side, exchanging iconography, painting styles, and materials. Ethiopian priests also traveled to Rome and Jerusalem, and encountered and sought out other Eastern Orthodox Christian clerics from Byzantium and Armenia, among other regions. Artists from Limoges, France produced high quality examples of enamelwork for the Ethiopian market around the year 1500, and some of the surviving objects were integrated with Ethiopian-made metalwork pieces. This process of symbiotic exchange among artists of diverse origins both in Ethiopia and abroad underscores the underappreciated impact of Ethiopian art.

### Group Text - Object Label



TOP

#### **Diptych with Mary and Her Son Flanked by Archangels, Apostles and a Saint**

Follower of Fre Seyon

Ethiopian, late 15th century

Tempera on wood

36.12, The Walters Art Museum, museum purchase, the W. Alton Jones Foundation Acquisition Fund, 2001, from the Nancy and Robert Nooter Collection

BOTTOM

#### **Right Half of a Diptych with Mary and Her Son Flanked by Angels**

Niccolò Brancalone, active 1480–1521

Ethiopia, ca. 1500

Tempera on wood

36.15, The Walters Art Museum, museum purchase, with funds from anonymous donor, 2002



These icons were painted by two artists who worked at the Ethiopian court in the fifteenth century: Fre Seyon (at left), the most famous Ethiopian painter of his day, and Niccolò Brancalone (at right), a Venetian monk. During this time, Ethiopian rulers invited Italian painters to the royal court, where they worked side-by-side with local artists. In both these depictions of Mary with her Son, the European and Ethiopian artists select and combine elements drawn from both their respective artistic traditions. The Ethiopian painter models the poses and intimacy of Mary and Christ on the famous miracle-working icon in the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, while the Italian artist adopts the Ethiopian limited palette of red, yellow, blue, and green and tradition of placing Christ on Mary's right side.

## Ethiopia: At the Crossroads *at the* Walters Art Museum

Sample Interpretive Text



Group Text -  
Object Label

LEFT

### **Miracles of Mary**

Gondar, 17th century

Tempera on parchment

2002.4, The Art Institute of Chicago, fols. 46v-47r

RIGHT

### **Madonna of the Immaculate Conception**

Goa, 1680-1700

Ivory with gilding and paint

71.342, The Walters Art Museum, acquired by Henry Walters, bequest to Walters Art Museum, 1931

In the 17th century, Jesuit missionaries traveled from Europe to Ethiopia to convert Ethiopians to Catholicism. Although such efforts failed, Ethiopian artists embraced some of the Catholic iconography that these visitors brought with them. Further travel through Ethiopia to the Indian Ocean led to the establishment of Christian communities in coastal cities like Goa, India, as well as trade networks that conveyed religious beliefs and imagery from Africa to India and vice versa. This Goan ivory depicting the Virgin standing atop a crescent moon is derived from the Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. Although this belief was not embraced by Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, the visual motif was adopted and adapted by Ethiopian artists in contemporary manuscripts, such as this *Miracles of Mary* from Gondar, where the Virgin stands with crossed arms addressing the faithful.

# Ethiopia: At the Crossroads *at the* Walters Art Museum

Sample Interpretive Text



Group Text -  
Object Label

LEFT

## **'Alam**

Ethiopian (Harar), late 19th century

Bronze

Af1939,09.8, The British Museum, donated by Mrs. Henry Perrin, 1939

RIGHT

## **Processional Cross**

Ethiopian (Gondar), late 18th century

Brass

54.2893, The Walters Art Museum, museum purchase with funds provided by the W. Alton Jones Foundation Acquisition Fund, 1996

Large-scale metalwork processional crosses have been integral to the performance of the Ethiopian Orthodox liturgy from its foundation up to the present day. This cross is stamped out of a sheet of brass and then incised with figures and scenes, including Mary and her Son, episodes from the Life of Christ, and Saints George and Takla Haymanot. Its form and ceremonial function finds parallel in a 19th-century Ethiopian 'alam, or processional standard, filled with an Arabic inscription that reads, "There is only one God, and Muhammed is his prophet." Muslims arrived in Ethiopia as exiles from Mecca during the Aksumite dynasty (3rd- 7th century CE), and the two religions still co-exist in Ethiopia today.