

The goal of this exhibition is education through dialogue and the exchange of experiences, as well as the creation of opportunities for artists exhibiting for the first time in Croatia (Museum Lapidarium, Novigrad, 2025) and Slovenia (KIBLA, Maribor, 2026). Both, the exhibition and the accompanying programs seek to engage the audience in participation and meaningful conversations about contemporary art and the themes explored by the invited artists. Interaction is developed through lectures, art workshops, readings of African literature, or participation in a fashion show, as well as through the exhibition itself, while opening up different perspectives and encouraging the audience to form their own interpretations.

– Goran Tomčić

The project was developed in collaboration with the **Lapidarium Museum** in Novigrad, Istria, Croatia.



ART FROM A SUITCASE

MMC KIBLA/KiBela: 23 January–14 March 2026
artKIT: 23 January–7 March 2026

MMC KIBLA/KiBela, Ulica kneza Koclja 9, Maribor
Opening hours: Monday to Friday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Saturday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

artKIT, Glavni trg 14, Maribor
Opening hours: Tuesday to Friday from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m., Saturday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Art from a Suitcase

MMC KIBLA/KiBela: 23 January–14 March 2026
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The exhibition »Art from a Suitcase« brings together the contemporary practice of artists who live in or come from countries of the Global South, and whose works can be packed into the dimensions of a suitcase. This curatorial project presents the possibilities of contemporary artistic activity through the artistic practice of countries that the curators of the exhibition have visited on several occasions: Ethiopia, Ghana and Guatemala. Also included are several artists with a migration past who work in global art centers: Ethiopian artists Engdaget Legesse Amede and Henok Getachew from Berlin, and Klaus Mertens, a German artist who lived and worked in Addis Ababa for a large part of his career; Turkish artist Hale Ekinci from Chicago; Ghanaian artist Emmanuel Boateng from London.

The exhibition and Arterija Festival present artistic approaches to participating in the era of globalization: to participate means to give up something in exchange for something in return. Conceptually speaking, the artists in this exhibition are in a constant search for the representation of their acquired and disappearing identity. Exhibited are artworks that engage primarily with recycled materials and media, as well as works by artists who explore the legacy of traditional artistic media. From Berlin comes Ethiopian artist Engdaget Legesse Amede, whose technique of preparing canvases is similar to the technique of weaving, and in which the artist's main inspiration is the poetic visuality of his native language, Amharic. From Addis Ababa come paintings by many young painters. Mahlet Afework is a painter and poet whose paintings are like time capsules that convey casual moments of people in living rooms from the past. Mewded Dagnachew offers us mixed media drawings on paper from the series "Broken Wings," which radiate the nostalgia of collective memory from Ethiopia's past and with an approach that combines realism and abstraction. Dawit Tamrat exhibits two paintings from his series that convey the typical structure of disappearing houses from the villages and suburbs where the artist lived, focusing on specific ways of construction where the houses are chaotically stacked, one on top of the other, defining the identity of the people who live in them. Abel Beyene Disasa is a painter of portraits and bodily gestures, whose paintings explore the complexity of human emotions within the issues of identity and environment that shape contemporary Ethiopian society, especially the urbanity of Addis Ababa. Birhanu Manaye, who lives and creates in Addis Ababa, explores traditional visual patterns and threads of collective and individual memory through a series of silkscreen works on canvas, portraying the deep connection Ethiopian society has with textiles and their meaning and symbolism. Michael Tsegaye presents himself with two black-and-white photographs from his series of photographs that chronologically follow changing life in Addis Ababa through topographical cityscapes and disappearing old settlements that once defined the galloping modern metropolis.

We live in a world of constant consumption and accumulation of objects, in a world of accumulated waste. In Ghana, where an important part of the economy is developed around trade in used clothes, textile pollution is one of the greatest environmental tragedies of our time. Ghana's shores are littered with accumulated waste, recycled clothing and footwear from the Global North, which is shipped in bales and sold in Ghana as a final land-fill site. The vast majority of bales of clothing and footwear end up in Ghana's Atlantic Ocean, permanently

degrading the environment for fishermen, while providing local artists with a constant flow of materials for socially engaged works, and for their research into the state of sustainability through the circular economy. Waste is a starting point of the works of many artists from Ghana, among whom Patrick Tagoe-Turkson, who is represented with works woven from recycled flip-flops found on the shores of southern Ghana, subtly playing with the tension between the everyday and the beautiful, and with the concepts of transforming waste into art. Similarly, Addis Ababa-based Tewodros Bekele explores issues of environmental sustainability in visual art, and for this exhibition pre-sents fragile figurines of musicians made from recycled blue plastic bottle packaging. Another Addis Ababa-based artist, Dariwos Hailemichael, offers works from the "Metamorphosis" series, a humorous and ironic series of seemingly typically African masks that connect the spiritual and living worlds, but in this case made from parts of recycled plastic canisters. From Berlin comes Ethiopian artist Henok Getachew, who presents his in situ kinetic installation "Upcoming Deadlines." This installation allows us to experience the endless flow of waste in its pure power and in the accidental beauty of the everyday materials we discard. From Germany comes Klaus Mertens, who presents his "Skin of Consumption" performance and sculptural work, which focus on the theme of overconsumption and waste, and therefore explore the potential of a circular economy. As part of the performance, the participants wear clothes made from plastic waste, highlighting the use of recycled materials in art.

Many artists from the Global South draw inspiration from objects that depict memories of past times and sudden change. Such is the case with the use of second-hand books "Selected Works of V.I. Lenin" in English translation, purchased at Africa's largest open-air market, Merkato Market in Addis Ababa, which, in the studio of artist Dareje Shiferaw, have become, as the artist calls his drawings and texts, "wounded pages" of artist books.

Africa is experiencing the fastest rate of urbanization in the world, with its urban population projected to double by 2050. This rapid influx of people into urban areas is putting enormous pressure on existing infrastructure. Following our Zeitgeist, many of the artists in this exhibition base their artistic practice on interpreting and recycling discarded objects and materials to tell stories of uncontrolled, intensive urbanism, global warming and pollution, the speed of changing lifestyles, and issues of postcolonial, emotional, and sexual emancipation. Issues of institutional neglect, lack of public funding and private sponsorship, or an established art market have been constantly questioned throughout the two-year planning of this exhibition. The greatest obstacle is the severe restrictions on the flow of people, the lack of freedom of movement and travel, which in countries of the Global South, and especially in Africa, represent a great burden for contemporary artists, who are often invited to exhibitions to which they are not allowed to travel. The phrase "art has no borders" reflects the idea that artistic expression transcends geographical, cultural, and even conceptual limitations. It suggests that art can be a universal language, connecting people and ideas, bridging divides. Although art is often created within specific contexts and with certain constraints, its influence and interpretation extend far beyond those boundaries. I believe that art today has adopted a universal, global language, with which it breaks down borders, but these borders are known and constructed by a bureaucracy that often prevents and hinders dialogue through the expensive, lengthy, Kafkaesque uncertainty of the visa application process.

Most of the artists in this exhibition live and work on the African continent. The initial idea for the exhibition involved the art of packing, and travel, in which the artist is a performer, artist, traveler and tourist. This long journey to the exhibition space is full of worry about customs controls, which should be passed through as painlessly as possible, because sometimes the entire art installation is packed in suitcases, and if the contents of the suitcase need to be shown at the border crossing, how to explain those abstract parts (plastic, wires, used fabrics, waste,

and the like), fragments of something that can only grow into a whole under an artistic concept and in a given space? How to explain at the border control the current or probable economic unviability of an artistic performance or an artistic work that will be exhibited in a non-profit museum? How to organize a demanding international exhibition without basic support for the transportation and insurance of works of art, the travel and visa costs of artists, or how to ensure the participation of artists who are denied travel visas? This exhibition presents the works of twenty artists, out of thirty who were invited to participate. The original plan was to transfer the works in suitcases as a metaphor that connects this exhibition with contemporary nomadism and migration, thus symbolizing the economy of travel and the process of transferring goods. However, after two years of working on the exhibition, most of the invited artists did not get the necessary visas to enter the Schengen area, and the number of artists who were present in Novi-grad at the festival accompanying the exhibition was reduced to eight artists, most of whom live in Europe. The works of other artists were either brought in suitcases by curators who traveled with the works, or the artists themselves found a way to send the works in the suitcases of relatives, friends, or acquaintances, who were allowed to travel and who delivered the works to the museum.

Our time is characterized by speed and the instant flow of information and images, while the preparation of contemporary art exhibitions is shaped by the same urgency. The conditions for exhibiting art in the 21st century reflect the reality of global coexistence, in which the centers of the art world are no longer confined to cities with a developed artistic infrastructure. Former peripheries are now places that provide equal opportunities for the development of artistic language, and are often pioneers of new tendencies in art. However, the vast majority of artists from the Global South are still deprived of the benefits of networking, of the flow of knowledge and information, and of the support that is available to artists in Europe and other countries of the Global North. In this context, the exhibition functions as a sort of workshop for exploring informality in contemporary art, and acts as a training ground for asking questions about the possibilities for exhibiting artists from developing countries.

For many artists from the Global South, textiles are the main source of inspiration and one of the most common and accessible materials. They are a bridge between heritage and the present, an indicator of memory and a powerful symbol of identity, embodying balance between fluidity and structure, transience and permanence, and the specificity of local culture in the vortex of globalization. Artist Quique Lee from Guatemala, through textiles, embroidery and the social engagement of participants, explores masculinity and the identity of participants in general. Hale Ekinçi, an artist of Turkish origin based in the USA, uses weaving to question memory, migration and the tradition of women's crafts of weaving and embroidery, creating spatial, delicate sculptures and installations. Kirubel Melke, a textile artist from Ethiopia, is known for his innovative textile collages made from found fragments of fabrics of different textures and colors, with which he tells stories from the personal and collective, and Ethiopian past and present. Zelalem Merga is an interdisciplinary artist from Addis Ababa, who in this exhibition offers textile collages of African design in oval ceiling lamp frames. Frederick Bamfo, from Ghana, is known for creating poetic tent-like forms made from used denim, while addressing the architectural landscape and meaning of textiles to examine the legacy of slavery, spatiality, materiality, participation and 21st century geopolitics. Artist Cecilia Lamptey-Boateng, too, is an artist from Ghana with an address in the US, whose central theme of artistic work lies in the exploration of the concept of African femininity, focusing on the everyday life and clothing of women, while showing how the camera has become a powerful tool for decolonization. A Ghanaian artist living in Great Britain, Emmanuel Boateng, creates textile collages and installations through fragments of the traditional Ghanaian Kente style of weaving that question the notions of race and the representation of Africa in contemporary artistic practice.