

Bradley Ertaskiran

Dawit L. Petros
Gold, Black, Afterlives
May 15 to July 5, 2025

In 1935, faced with international economic sanctions following the invasion of Ethiopia, Benito Mussolini initiated the *Date Oro alla Patria* ("Give Gold for the Fatherland") campaign, urging local and overseas Italians to donate their gold assets to finance the Fascists' war machine. The material underpinnings of Italy's pursuit of national pageantry and imperial power underline Dawit L. Petros's exhibition, *Gold, Black, Afterlives*. This new body of mixed-media work builds on Petros' long-term explorations of the conflated historical narratives surrounding progress and modernity, specifically fascist Italy's colonial ambitions and their enduring legacies in Northeast Africa, Europe, and North America.

This exhibition marks the first public presentation of Petros's engagements with mylar. These works bridge contemporary realities and historical imaginaries, conjuring a flood of visually and symbolically imposing associations. The pliable material is an emergency blanket, typically wrapped around bodies in distress, yet it simultaneously recalls the prized use of gold leaf in art and the pursuit of wealth and future prospects.

An imposing and irregular field of crinkled mylar, *What comes into being (Ricochet)*, envelopes viewers in its material intensity. Intimate yet expansive, *Werki* is a series juxtaposing inverted black-and-white screen prints with a reflective ground extending beyond the frame's edges. *Untitled (Itineraries of Dispersal, Ostia Antica, Rome, III and IV)* reverses this gesture, the photograph acting as the structural support. All the mylar works radiate a shimmering light while their surfaces are exposed, vulnerable, and imperfect. Their mirror quality necessarily implicates the viewer in the act of looking.

Complimenting the mylar works are *Spectral Fragments*, ghostly CNC etchings of absent infrastructures of empire, restaged within contemporary photographic landscapes. *Spectral Fragment, V (Sky Ride)*, reimagines a cableway system, the premier technical marvel of the 1933-34 Chicago World Fair (or the Century of Progress Exposition), with its twin *Spectral Fragment, IV (Teleferica)*, in colonial Eritrea. *Spectral Fragment, III (Savoia-Marchetti)*, depicts the luminous image of a crashed seaplane, an emblem of Italy's empirical pursuits and aspirations to extricate itself from its antiquated past. Here, aesthetic strategies of opacity, fragmentation, and ambivalence surface, contradicting narratives of progress in technical achievement. As in his larger practice, Petros underscores invisibility over visibility; how what one experiences is a reminder of what is out of view.

Recollections (Contrasting Notions) (2023–2025) inject the exhibition with chromatic punctuation; thick, abstract, saturated bands dominate thirteen images, each segment a spliced encounter with Italo-African events. It takes a concerted effort to focus on the more representational lower half of the artwork; each element of the image flickers between signification and its undoing, tempting us to turn our gaze away in search of a reference that might offer stable ground. The intermingling, overlapping of colours and images evoke Petros's approach to abstraction as an active operation—one that offers materiality, surface, shape, and site as a means of fleshing out unstable and fraught histories.

Dawit L. Petros (b. 1972, Eritrea) lives and works in Montreal and New Hampshire. He holds an MFA in Visual Art from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts of Tufts University (Boston), a BFA in Photography from Concordia University (Montreal), and a BA in History from the University of Saskatchewan (Saskatoon). Petros was a fellow at the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program. His work has been exhibited in institutions such as the Tate Modern (London), Haus der Kunst (Munich), Royal Ontario Museum (Toronto), Huis Marseille Museum (Amsterdam), the Museum of Contemporary Photography (Chicago), the National Museum of African Art (Washington), the Museum of Fine Arts (Boston), The Power Plant (Toronto), Bradley Ertaskiran (Montreal), and Tiwani Contemporary (London). Upcoming presentations include the 2025 Liverpool Biennial and a survey at Remail Modern (Saskatoon). His works are also collected by various corporate and institutional collections, namely the Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto), Yale University (New Haven), the Museum of Contemporary Photography (Chicago), the Studio Museum (Harlem), the Museum of Fine Arts (Houston), Global Affairs Canada (Ottawa), Mana Contemporary (Jersey City), the Chrysler Museum of Art (Norfolk), the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, and the Collection de la Caisse de Dépôt et de Placement du Québec. He is the recipient of the Terra Foundation for American Art Research Fellowship (2021-23), the Paul de Hueck and Norman Walford Career Achievement Award in Photography (2021), and the Duke and Duchess of York Prize in Photography (2021), as well as being named a finalist in the Norval Sovereign African Art Prize (2022) and for the Scotiabank Photography Award (2025).

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