

Marlborough

PRESS RELEASE

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Hans Silvester **PAINTED HOUSES: SOUTHERN ETHIOPIA**

OCTOBER 17 - NOVEMBER 23, 2013

OPENING RECEPTION: THURSDAY, OCTOBER 17, 6-8PM

NEW YORK, NEW YORK: The Directors of Marlborough Gallery are pleased to announce that the exhibition of photographs by Hans Silvester titled *Painted Houses: Southern Ethiopia* will open at Marlborough Gallery on October 17, 2013 and continue through November 23, 2013. This is Silvester's third show with Marlborough in New York and will feature approximately twenty photographs of the extraordinary wall paintings found in the houses of the people of the Bench area in Southern Ethiopia. Silvester's photographs capture the astonishing beauty of their intricately painted homes, inviting viewers to discover new ways of seeing and appreciating this area.



The people of the Bench tribes live in isolated hamlets of six to twelve huts in the mountains outside of the city of Mizan, speaking their own language. Predominantly farmers, these people use centuries-old tools to grow small quantities of coffee, mangos, manioc, sugarcane and corn on the unforgiving land. They construct their huts with wood and mud, and cover the walls with a plaster mixture of straw, earth, and cow manure. The interior of each house is divided into two sections: one for the animals and the other for the family. Both interior and exterior walls are painted with schemes that range from abstract geometric patterns that repeat mesmerizingly to depictions of flowers and animals. Rendered in white, yellow, orange and ochre, the natural pigments used are derived from the soil, rocks, and plants of the surrounding environment and combine to create a vast palette of colors. It is the women and girls of the tribe who make these paintings with their fingers. Due to the tropical climate, the frequent rain necessitates the regular re-painting of these beautiful decorations, lending an ephemeral nature to this art.

Fascinated by the Bench tribe's painting practices and astounded by the beauty of their art, Silvester captures the diverse and extraordinary effects that they achieve through their ancient tradition. "What touched me with these paintings is the modern look of the patterns. These paintings on the facade really belong to their lives; they make the people's everyday lives more beautiful." The magnificence of Silvester's photos not only results from his incomparable work as a photographer, but also from his understanding of the people of the Bench tribes, who have been welcoming him into their community since 2008.

Silvester's on-going relationship with the tribes of Southern Ethiopia has produced two previous series of photographs, *Natural Fashion* and *Les Peuples de l'Omo*, in which he captured the extraordinary self-decorating practices of the people of the Surma and Mursi tribes. Called "revelatory and disturbing," (R. Smith, New York Times), Silvester's photographs captured the astonishing beauty of their rituals, in which they paint themselves with natural pigments and decorate their heads and bodies with plants and flowers in a tradition that seems unchanged for thousands of years.

Born in 1938 in Lorrach, Germany, and based in southern France, Silvester is recognized for a wide-ranging oeuvre and a protracted study of his subjects, most frequently nature, animals and the environment. His work is the subject of almost fifty books, including a photo essay on Camargue in 1960, a well-regarded documentation of Europe's nature preserves in 1982 and a series of books on Provence published throughout the 1990s. Silvester's earlier series of photographs, *Natural Fashion*, was published in book form by Thames & Hudson, New York in 2008. The book, Silvester's most recent, is entitled *Natural Fashion: Tribal Decoration from Africa* and features an essay by the artist accompanied by 160 color photographs. Silvester is currently preparing a book about the *Painted Houses: Southern Ethiopia* photographs that will be published in 2014.

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IMAGE: *Painted Houses: Southern Ethiopia (No. 14)*, 2011-2013, C-print, Edition of 10
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