



Anthony Gebrehiwot

Beyond the Veil of Time
Bridging Black Temporalities

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What would life feel like without clocks—no calendars full of appointments demanding you rush from one thing to the next? Imagine the freedom of experiencing time as an expansive, unlimited, and unmeasurable dimension.

Anthony Gebrehiwot's artwork raises questions about how much of our experience of time is defined by the oppressive influence of the clock on cultural, scientific, and linguistic systems. Referencing Black Quantum Futurism (BQF), a theoretical framework and art practice that critically examines how time has been used as a tool for colonialism to structure labour and promote consumption, Gebrehiwot's practice describes Black futures that are freed from such oppressive systems.

As artist and author Rasheedah Phillips (co-founder of BQF) wrote,

“Clocks are not just devices telling the time, but can be viewed as another type of map... As maps structure our perception of space, clocks structure our perception of time.”¹

There are many other experiences of the unfolding events of our lives in which time seems to expand, or speed up, or collapse all together. This fluid version of time, one that is shaped by the perspectives and purposes of those studying or experiencing it, is the territory that is explored within this exhibition.

Gebrehiwot's work, like that of BQF, draws on the broader cultural movement of *Afrofuturism*, which blends science, art, and technology with historical African aesthetics. His photographs and digital collages present imaginative worlds where Afro-diasporic subjects are liberated from colonial structures of identity and time. Unbound from the ticking clock, the subjects in Gebrehiwot's work navigate the interwoven threads of past, present, and future through imagery that bridges physical and spiritual realms.

Photography is often thought of as a kind of time capsule that preserves moments. Each photographic image captures the visual trace of a length of time determined by the camera's shutter speed. So, time is an essential aspect of the creation of every photograph, each one acting as a kind of wormhole through which



Anthony Gebrehiwot, *Love is the Answer*, 2020, digital image. Image courtesy of the artist.

we can access the past. Photographs are prompts for memory and imagination that, in the reveries, recollections, or daydreams that they inspire, transport us out of our present surroundings. In this way, Gebrehiwot's medium is beautifully and meaningfully aligned with the concepts that drive his work.

The exhibition includes three related series. Initially, the viewer encounters Gebrehiwot's *Veilscapes*, which feature atmospheric images printed on fabrics of various degrees of translucency.

Drawing their name and some of their inspiration from works by American artist Delita Martin, these pieces layer portraiture, landscape, science fiction imagery, and digitally produced textures. The subtle layering within these works describes the liminal space between the physical and the spiritual. Installed off the wall, the *Veilscapes* create a layered visual experience of the gallery space that echoes the diverse experiences of time that are at the core of many of the works in the exhibition. The disruption of the typical gallery experience creates a sense that space and time have the potential to behave differently here.

Gebrehiwot's MAHABA series emerges from his creative practice of working with Black aesthetics to investigate the social dynamics of communities to consider and create situations that bring people together and strengthen communal spirit. The title, MAHABA, is the Swahili word for love, a feeling that bridges generations, impervious to the march of time. In the 2014 sci-fi movie, *Interstellar*, (an influential film for Gebrehiwot), one of the main characters argues in a pivotal scene,

“Love isn’t something we invented. It’s observable, powerful... Love is the one thing that we’re capable of perceiving that transcends dimensions of time and space.”

These images employ the aesthetics and techniques of contemporary portrait photography. Like many of his works, each image in the *MAHABA* series is a result of a collaborative process.



Anthony Gebrehiwot, *The Cultural Advocate*, 2024, photograph. Modelling and styling by Tiana Smith. Image courtesy of the artist.



Installation view of *Beyond the Veil of Time: Bridging Black Temporalities*.
Image courtesy of Latham Art Centre.

Working with textile artists, craftspeople, hairstylists, and makeup artists, Gebrehiwot fosters an environment in which speculative universes that radiate intimacy and emotion can be generated. His subjects are invested in the photographs for which they are posing, confidently open in front of the camera in an atmosphere of intimacy and agency that is crucial for the images to meet Gebrehiwot's objectives: to portray Black subjects with an affective power that highlights their humanity.

The pieces reassert the ways that ancestral ideas and aesthetics have an influential place in the here and now—that Africa's cultural heritage was not erased by hundreds of years of slavery, nor was it frozen within the anthropological documentation gathered during the height of the colonial period in the late 1800's. The confluence of past, present, and future with the metaphysical experience of love at play in *MAHABA* inspires a collective reimagining of Black futures that is present throughout the exhibition.

Gebrehiwot's photo-based digital collages make up the third series of work in the exhibition. During the covid pandemic, he began exploring alternatives to portrait photography as a way of maintaining his creative output. This mode of digital image-making is a new a way of deepening his response to Black Futurist concepts. In these works, Gebrehiwot superimposes the textures, filters, and techniques of digital editing software with original, invented, and scavenged imagery. The figures portrayed in these works inhabit fantastical worlds, where futuristic cities are surrounded by natural environments. At times, gravity-defying

protagonists float among UFOs and other symbolic imagery, to create artworks that hint at alternate dimensions of space-time that lay just beyond most people's limited perceptions.

These images use the sci-fi genre to imaginatively respond to recent discoveries by physicists, who are now able to analyze the behavior of quantum particles and are realizing that the rules that govern our understanding of time seem not to apply to certain phenomenon. Our linear understanding of time, moving like an arrow in only one direction may be an oversimplification. Perhaps humans have evolved in such a way that we cannot yet perceive the true, universal nature of time, but only the limited version of it that is measurable by the orbit of our planet around the sun.

We know that insects are able to perceive light waves that humans cannot. Why couldn't we evolve to perceive and navigate time and space differently? These works provide a glimpse into how that next stage of human evolution might appear.

Though his work references science fiction, Gebrehiwot doesn't only look towards imaginary space-time-travellers to find alternative models for his speculative futures. By integrating African aesthetics and figures into his work he is also referring to ancestral, pre-colonial African, and Afro-diasporic interpretations of time's flow in which moments are not isolated segments of time, but rather part of an interconnected, multidimensional, and communal phenomenon.² From such perspectives, time echoes between ancestral history, the present moment, and potential



Anthony Gebrehiwot, *Travelling Through Space and Time*, 2025, digital image.
Source material by Cerquiera. Image courtesy of the artist.

futures. According to these beliefs, and echoing findings in quantum science, time is not pictured as an arrow, but rather something more like a spiral. As Gebrehiwot poetically describes; the confluence of past, present, and future that is at play in this exhibition acts as a bridge between physical and spiritual realms to propose an imaginative roadmap to a shared future.

- Jeff Nye



Anthony Gebrehiwot

Anthony Gebrehiwot is an award-winning artist and community leader whose creative lens re-visions photography as an ongoing dialogue of social change between subject and society.

Gebrehiwot seeks to communicate without language in an intimate and vulnerable way: through his art, he portrays the vocabulary of race, masculinity, history, perception, and vulnerability. Combining contrasting landscapes, Black bodies, and raw human emotion, Gebrehiwot explores the affective power of Black bodies in confronting the viewer's humanity and empathy.

Footnotes:

1. Rasheedah Phillips, *Dismantling the Master's Clock: On Race, Space, and Time* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2025), 143.

2. Ibid, 55.

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