

EDITION Interview with Kiya Tadele Atnafu, February 11 2022  
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## ARTIST KIYA TADELE UNVEILS NEW NFT ART SERIES DEDICATED TO THE DIVERSITY & POWER OF AFRICAN HAIR

By Gabrielle Pharms | February 11, 2022

Artist collective [Yatreda](#) uses the skill of storytelling through exquisite imagery that captures the rich culture and history of Ethiopia. Through the metaverse, the collective ensures the preservation of their identity and legacy. Helmed by artist and model Kiya Tadele, Yatreda is debuting their newest and largest NFT art series to date, titled *STRONG HAIR*. Regarding the series, Tadele says, "This is a lot deeper than just hair. Our hair is a sculpture full of meaning." *STRONG HAIR* encourages women of color to embrace their crown of hair. Tadele adds, "I want everyone to be proud of their strong African hair. My goal is not only to preserve what remains. It's to help bring these styles back. Not just for Ethiopia, not just for Africa, but for the world."

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Artist collective [Yatreda](#) uses the skill of storytelling through exquisite imagery that captures the rich culture and history of Ethiopia. Through the metaverse, the collective ensures the preservation of their identity and legacy. Helmed by artist and model Kiya Tadele, Yatreda is debuting their newest and largest NFT art series to date, titled *STRONG HAIR*. Regarding the series, Tadele says, "This is a lot deeper than just hair. Our hair is a sculpture full of meaning." *STRONG HAIR* encourages women of color to embrace their crown of hair. Tadele adds, "I want everyone to be proud of their strong African hair. My goal is not only to preserve what remains. It's to help bring these styles back. Not just for Ethiopia, not just for Africa, but for the world."

See more: [How Celebrity Hairstylist Jawara Is Elevating Hair As Art](#)

Here, Tadele talks to *EDITION* about her entry into the art world, Yatreda's beginnings, and the inspiration behind the soul-stirring *STRONG HAIR* series.



In addition to modeling, has creating art always resonated with you through your journey? What was your initial impression of getting involved with the art world? Any influences?

Back when I did modeling, I always found myself very curious with everything happening around me on a photo shoot. I asked many technical questions about this or that. I always knew something was different within me because I felt more familiar with the photographer and lighting crew than with the other models. At that time, I had a minimal understanding of what an artist was, and I didn't know it could be inside me too.

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Now, I'm into the art. My influences are not vast like someone who went and studied every art history. They are simple, drawn from the few talented artists who I assisted and shaped the world around me – African history, Ethiopian culture. I am influenced by artists whose work is international but maintains an unbreakable connection to our homeland, like Mulatu Astatke and Gigi Shibabaw.



What is Yatreda, and what inspired you to launch this collective?

Yatreda is the collective family name for everyone participating in the artistic chaos in our house! Historical costumes being sewn by hand, musicians from across from the deep country sleeping on a mattress on our floor, attaching some background to our homemade metal stage. That is Yatreda. I am inspired to lead this collective and preserve these Ethiopian things because this is the only chance we got. Our modern generation loves the cheap, fake, plastic imported things. We need to love and cherish those old classic things only found in Ethiopia.

Does your artwork have a common theme? If so, what are those motifs?

My artwork balances something new, like blockchain technology and NFTs, to preserve and present something old, such as classic legends of the past. Aesthetically, the black and white approach is interwoven with video elements that just couldn't exist in an old print. There is motion and movement that bring these things back to life. This mix of old and new is to suggest the timeline of our history doesn't simply end; these stories are not finished. They belong to the past but also belong to us today – the art is about rediscovering our original selves once again.

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What was your introduction to the NFT space? Has the metaverse community been welcoming?

Our international friends Sam Spratt, Lyle Owerko, Eolo Perfido, and Justin Aversano helped us discover this new world. Everyone is eager to help bring unique voices to the metaverse. When I started, I had not many followers on Twitter. We started very organically after that everybody is always showing me their love.



For the NFT you're releasing on February 11th, what's it called, and what are the inspirations behind it?

*STRONG HAIR* captures the diversity and power of our African hair. We created motion portraits of 100 different hairstyles from all across Ethiopia. The afros, the shaved patterns, and the unique braids of different peoples from some of the most remote regions of Ethiopia.

This is a lot deeper than just hair. Our hair is a sculpture full of meaning. Sometimes just by looking at someone, you can identify their nation or tribe. Hair can be a social signal. Certain styles are for unmarried women. Others are only for mothers. Hair can be a status symbol. A special clay molded by hand is the sign of a respected man. There is also a lot of originality; expressing culture doesn't mean only copying from the past. Our ancestor's techniques can be advanced with creativity that can say something totally new.



Sometimes our natural African hair is not respected, and we spend too much time and money making it look like something we are not. Many people have embraced modern city styles, or they are influenced from the outside world. When we lose a hairstyle, we lose an expression that may never be repeated again. What we are really losing is a visual language. Imagine... thousands of years of culture have created these looks. I want everyone to be proud of their strong African hair. My goal is not only to preserve what remains. It's to help bring these styles back. Not just for Ethiopia, not just for Africa, but for the world.



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How has getting involved in art shaped who you are as a person?

I have become more conscious about what I put into the world because now, more and more eyes are on me. I want to be a good role model and use this artwork for something positive. There is a strong and real community at Foundation, all who found a love for our unique vision of Ethiopia. My motion portrait work has been collected by prominent female collectors, several DAOs, individual early builders of Ethereum, and even by other artists. Yatreda is now part of a global conversation that simply did not exist before. I, too, have felt this vibe and collected artworks that I feel are important to this conversation. But this feeling has always been there; it is totally human. We just didn't have the right soil. Web2 made us feel like nobody cared. Web3 has given us a fertile new space. We are all pioneers in this strange but exciting land.



What goals are you hoping to achieve into 2022 and beyond?

Every project we started gets more and more complicated and more expanded. STRONG HAIR is the biggest Yatreda collection yet. Even I began shooting this collection before some other things that are already released. So it's hard to imagine a world that comes after *STRONG HAIR* because it is literally 100 pieces! The most we ever released as a collection before was 12.

I want to continue to build value for our collectors. I want early participants of Web3 to cherish this artwork forever as representing this unique crossroads in time we find ourselves in. I want to be genuine and not change my approach even with this Ethereum. I want to grow, but I don't want to be changed by the other kinds of art other people are doing or what is trendy. I want to keep the same distinct voice we had when we had nothing.

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