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RICHARD PANKHURST – RITA PANKHURST, Addis Abäba

### Personalia

*In memoriam Afäwäraq Täkle (1932–2012)*

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## Personalia

took their child and left revolutionary Ethiopia, he changed, adopting an easy, devil-may-care kind of life of drinking and drugs (mainly *çat*), and did not take his work too seriously. He went from one place of work to another in rather rapid rotation, but never seemed to lack the means of support. After some time, he started to live with “another woman”, and had several children with her. Though considered a loving man, both to his friends and – perhaps first of all – to children in general. He was caring and cheerful under changing circumstances, and because of his cheerfulness and his friendliness, many people became attached to him. One of them was the author and journalist Bā’alu Gərma, who made Səbhat and his life the basis of his novel *Därasiw* (‘The author’). Other friends gave him jobs when he needed to earn a living. He said that he enjoyed life thoroughly. In spite of his innovative approach to literature, which offended many, he adopted a realistic attitude to how life should or can be described in popular books. In ancient Rome, there were life styles perhaps not very different from life in Addis Abäba, but it was *sub rosa*, this means that one could, in certain gatherings, say and do things that were never to be repeated outside the spaces where they took place. Səbhat described what everyone knows, or is aware of, and most males and many females participated in; but he was the first to write about it openly and detached from where they took place. Many love him for it; others appear or pretend to be shocked.

He was a delightful companion, whether one likes his writing or not.

### In memoriam Afäwärq Täkle (1932–2012)

RICHARD PANKHURST – RITA PANKHURST, Addis Abäba

Afäwärq Täkle was Ethiopia’s most celebrated artist. Born in the old Šawan capital, Ankobär, on 22 October 1932, he was the son of *Ato* Täklä Mamo, a minor court functionary, and *Wäyzäro* Fälläqäč Yəmatawärq. As a small child, Afäwärq was seriously wounded during the Italian invasion. After the Liberation, he was enrolled in Addis Abäba’s Patriots’ School, together with the children of other Ethiopian Patriots. He was subsequently selected as one of the first students to be admitted to the newly established, élite Ḥaylä Šəllase I Secondary School at Kotäbe. There he studied with sons of the nobility and other youngsters destined to play important roles in post-war Ethiopian government.

In 1944 Richard Pankhurst's mother, the British Suffragette, Sylvia Pankhurst, visited this school. She had been editing *New Times and Ethiopia News* – a publication in support of Ethiopia since 1936, and was on her first trip to the country. One of the school's teachers showed her Afäwärq's exercise-books. They included several interesting sketches, which showed signs of considerable artistic promise. She took a particular interest in these, having studied art herself but, much to her regret, had given it up to dedicate herself to political campaigning. In the summer of 1947, Afäwärq, then aged 15, was selected for further education in Britain – one of a number of chosen Ethiopian students to be sent abroad. On arrival at the airport in London there was no one to meet them, as it was a public holiday and the Ethiopian Legation had not been informed of their arrival. An airline official asked them, if by any chance, they knew anyone in England. Afäwärq thought for a minute and remembered that an English woman had been shown his sketches when she visited the school some years earlier. He also remembered her name. The official looked in the London telephone directory and found her phone number, called her and explained the situation. Sylvia Pankhurst said she would find someone to collect and accommodate the stranded young Ethiopians. She then asked her son Richard to look for them at the airport, and bring them home – which he did. Thus began a friendship which was to last a lifetime.

After this dramatic start in England, Afäwärq was admitted to Leighton Park Secondary School, the Quaker boarding establishment in Reading. There his nick-name was "After Work". On joining the school, Afäwärq, who had been brought up to venerate teachers in the Ethiopian manner, was appalled to see one of his fellow students aim a paper pellet at the master, who had turned his back to the class to write on the blackboard. Afäwärq, unfamiliar with the English students' code against "sneaks", raised his hand and, in anger at this lack of respect for a teacher, pointed to the culprit, saying: "He did it, Sir. I saw him."

The Ethiopian Government had intended him to be a mining engineer, but Sylvia Pankhurst, recognizing his artistic talent, and his desire to become an artist, wrote to Addis Abäba in support of a change of education and future career. This was granted, and he was duly enrolled at the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London. He went on to become the first African student to be accepted by the prestigious Slade School of Fine Arts in the British capital.

While an art student Afäwärq partially financed himself by winning prizes at ballroom dancing competitions. He at all times adopted a supremely patriotic stance. Once, in London, Richard went with him, as usual, to the canteen at India House in the Strand. The waiter, seeing the young African customer, thought fit to warn him that Indian food was spicy. Afäwärq felt that, as an Ethiopian, he was being patronised. He accordingly spread even

more chili powder on his food until it was entirely red in colour. He later admitted that the meal was “a little on the hot side” – but explained that the waiter needed educating about Ethiopia.

Before returning to Ethiopia Afäwärq and his some-time flat-mate, Habtab Bayru, brother of the Eritrean Unionist leader Tädla Bayru, accompanied Bərhanu Täsämma, of the Ethiopian Embassy in London, on an extensive European tour. They admired European art – Paris, Madrid and Rome – and, at the British Library, looked at the Ethiopian manuscripts looted from Mäqdäla. Afäwärq became a great admirer of Spanish culture and art. Some art critics observed that he was greatly influenced by the Spanish painter El Greco, an observation Afäwärq did not appreciate. He was keen on bull-fighting, a passion from which we had difficulty in weaning him.

On his return to Addis Abäba in 1954 Afäwärq was attached to the National Library of Ethiopia where he was allocated space for a studio. He began to refer to himself as “Afäwärq, Son of Thunder” – and this designation later appeared as a shield, both in Amharic and English, on a wall of his house and on one of the doors of his car. In the same year he held his first one-man exhibition, opened by the Emperor at the Addis Abäba Municipality. It did much to raise the prestige – and pricing – of modern Ethiopian art. This was a cause he always championed vigorously, thereby raising the status and income of many an Ethiopian artist.

Following this, he and another more experienced traditional Ethiopian artist, ፎጠራዊ ስራየየን were assigned to decorate St. George’s Cathedral, which had been damaged in February 1937 during the fascist repression following the attempt on the life of the Italian viceroy Graziani. After learning about them in France Afäwärq designed and executed mosaics for the upper part of one of the inner walls of the Cathedral. As he was applying the mosaics, standing, precariously, high up on a platform, he fell to the ground, escaping injury. He ascribed his almost miraculous escape to the intervention of St. George. Among the paintings for the cathedral was a large-scale representation of the Queen of Sheba arriving with gifts at the court of King Solomon.

In 1958, he was commissioned to decorate Africa Hall, the then new United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) building, for which he produced his most famous work: the triptych of three stained glass windows which, over 150 cm<sup>2</sup>, depict the sorrow of the colonial past, the struggle of the present, and the hope for the future of independent Africa. He was much irritated when the ECA authorities cut a door in one of his windows to connect with a newly erected building, which interfered with the morning sun, illuminating his masterpiece from behind.

By this time Richard and Rita were married and living in Addis Abäba together with Sylvia Pankhurst. Afäwärq often spent time with us. He and Mengästu Lämna, were the *mize*, or “best men” at our wedding in 1957. He

stayed in our house whilst he designed and built Villa Alpha, his house and studio, inspired by the Gondär Castles. It had its own chapel, for Afäwärq, though he did not fast, considered himself a loyal Ethiopian Orthodox Christian, and regularly saw his Father Confessor. Afäwärq steadily expanded his Villa, with the intention of ultimately bequeathing it to Ethiopia as a museum. Partly for this reason, he was reluctant to sell originals of his works, preferring to produce reproductions, which reached a wide public.

At that time Afäwärq produced several cover illustrations for *Ethiopia Observer*, which Richard and his mother edited. He would regularly have coffee with Rita, who was then a librarian at the National Library. Princess Hirut Dästa, who was a volunteer helping her at the Library, would also on occasion be invited.

Throughout his life Afäwärq maintained high standards of punctuality. Exasperated by the fact that ceremonies and other events nearly always began long after the scheduled time, he made a point of quietly departing if kept waiting for more than half an hour. He would select one of a number of standard excuses for his exit, the most frequent being that he had forgotten his pipe and had to fetch it from his car, after which he would quietly drive away. He dressed immaculately and expected his guests to be both punctual and correctly attired.

When asked to chair a meeting he would insist that participants spoke briefly, following the precept: “Don’t speak, telegraph”. He was himself a distinguished orator, having risen high in the ranks of speakers at the “Distinguished Toastmaster International” Branch in Addis Abäba, of which there was only one in the capital at that time.

Afäwärq was a prolific artist. He worked daily in his studio from morning till evening, mainly sketching and painting, as well as sculpting. Among many notable works he left to posterity were two for the Muslim city of Harar: the equestrian statue of *Ras Mak’ännän*, designed in 1958 and cast in bronze in 1968, and, for the Military Academy, stained glass windows of “Four great warriors of Ethiopia”: Aksumite Kings ‘Ezana and Kaleb, and later rulers Emperor Mäniläk II and *Ras Mäk’ännän*. He also painted a ‘Last Judgment’ for the Catholic Cathedral of ‘Addigrat.

Afäwärq went several times on artistic pilgrimages to Egypt and Europe. Seen by successive governments as a presentable unofficial ambassador, Afäwärq liked to talk of himself as a “political delinquent” i.e. an artist, rather than a politician. He travelled widely in connection with awards and exhibitions of his work, sketching and painting wherever he went: in Africa, Europe, Asia and America. In the course of his travels, and in Ethiopia he was introduced to royal personages, including the Queens of Belgium, England, Iran and Spain, and met important African statesmen, among them Kenneth

Kaunda, Jomo Kenyatta, Léopold Senghor and Kwame Nkrumah, who invited him to Ghana, where he made sketches for a portrait of the statesman.

Afäwärq was versatile in the subjects that attracted him, no less than in the forms his art took. He sketched and painted many Ethiopian landscapes, including an oil painting, “Sunrise over the Səmen Mountains”, 1963, a village scene in his birthplace, Ankobär, and the countryside around his rural residence at Awasa. He was fascinated, and re-created on canvas, the city and citizens of Harär, which he visited in 1957; he depicted historic buildings of Addis Abäba, such as the “Ənqulal bet” at the Mənilək Palace, 1956 (published in the *Ethiopia Observer*) and the castles of Gondär. He also produced a pen and wash image of St. George’s Church, Lalibäla, 1958.

Afäwärq left a number of paintings of beautiful women, Ethiopian and foreign. He would make many drawings and several paintings when something caught his eye, be it fencers after he had learned fencing, Spanish dancers, Russian ballet stars, bull fighters or fish swimming in the sea.

His work is represented in galleries abroad, notably his self-portrait hanging in the Permanent Collection of the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, Italy – the first work by an African artist to enter the permanent collection.

Over time he produced a number of other self-portraits. While still a student in England at the Slade School of Fine Arts he had painted a self-portrait in oil which he entitled “Young Ethiopian Painter”. One time in the 1960s, when visiting Rita’s parents in London, he gave them a monochrome portrait of himself. However, the most resplendent self-portrait was a full-length oil painting in his own version of Ethiopian dress, with his palette, his shield and a sword, 1973. He had made several designs of costumes he hoped would be adopted as the National Costume.

His profound devotion to Africa is demonstrated in the subject of many of his paintings. In 1960 he made a monochrome portrait of Patrice Lumumba, who, that year, had become the first Prime Minister of independent Congo. He was unceremoniously deposed, and was assassinated the following year. Afäwärq entitled the monochrome: “Hommage to Patrice Lumumba”. In addition to the monumental stained glass triptych in Africa Hall he produced a series of works entitled “African Heritage”. One of these hangs in the Ethiopian National Museum, another is a study for a tapestry, 1967/68, and another, “African Heritage with elephant” is a dramatic portrayal of African themes. Another large-scale work, his “African Unity Triptych” of 1974–76 was intended for a stained glass window. The studies of Nkrumah he made in Ghana resulted, in 1964, in an almost life-size oil painting of the Ghanaian President. In 1969 he painted “The Backbones of African Civilisation” which depicted the Aksum Obelisk among other African cultural symbols.

His most popular works include an oil painting entitled: “The *Mäsqäl* Flower”, 1959, of a beautiful young Ethiopian woman in an ornate dress and gold trimmed cloak, and the other, “Mother Ethiopia”, 1963, of a young and beautiful Ethiopian mother in national dress, holding a baby. In 1972, during the unrest prior to the Ethiopian Revolution, Afäwärq turned to more realistic and somber paintings: two were in monochrome, one of a blind man entitled “Sick at Heart”, another, of a man with a care-worn face he called “The peasant”. The artist also painted a grim water colour of a man entitled “Dark Soul”.

An excellent draughtsman and painter, Afäwärq was also a versatile master of several other media, in addition to mosaics, stained glass, and sculpture. In 1959 he designed a large silver cross, executed by the Ethiopian jeweller, Täklu Dästa, for the Chapel of the Tower of London, where it is on permanent display. While an art student he learned how to work with scraper board and produced a picture of Richard’s hands. He also designed numerous postage stamps, posters, playing cards, ties and scarves. A beautifully composed poster study of 1963 in gouache, entitled “This is Ethiopia” shows four representations of Ethiopian art in the four arms of an Ethiopian cross, itself decorated with crosses.

Afäwärq exhibited not only in Addis Abäba but also in Algeria, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Kenya, Russia, Senegal, the Soviet Union, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, the USA, and Zaire. Many of his works dealt specifically with the African Struggle for Independence.

He was recognized by many international awards, and, in 1964, was the first winner of the Haile Selassie I Prize for Fine Arts. He received the award from the Emperor in an Ethiopian costume he had designed himself, while ignoring the instructions from the Palace to wear formal European dress. In later years Afäwärq produced several religious compositions, notably one of Adam, Eve, and the Serpent, which seemed to reflect the artist’s increasing disillusion with an estranged wife. Never at a loss for a word, Afäwärq was able to pick up a few sentences of the local language in almost any country he visited, and use them aptly at public or other meetings. Among his friends, however, he made use of his own form of slang, borrowed from both English and Spanish. He would say of a man in any way persecuted, that he had been subjected to the “torture chamber treatment”, or, if Afäwärq had out-manoeuvred someone, he would say, alluding to a bullfight, that he had given that person the “torero finish”.

An exceptionally colourful character, Afäwärq was sometimes in conflict with those in authority and even with his friends. However, somehow, we succeeded never to fall out with one another. Every Sunday until his death on 10 April 2012 we would meet up, or, at the very least, he or Rita would phone each other. He considered our family and our children and grandchildren as

his own. His passing away leaves a big gap in all our lives. A large number of people attended his funeral at Holy Trinity Cathedral on Ethiopian Good Friday, 13 April. The Patriarch, *Abunä* Pāwlos V, spoke warmly about Afāwārq setting an example of an Ethiopian artist who worked hard throughout his life. Unusually for a church, his funeral oration by his friend, Ayalneh Mulat, elicited applause. An oration, also in Amharic, was earlier given at Mäsqäl Square, by our son Alula, in whom Afāwārq took a paternal interest. When we were living in London in the 1980s, Afāwārq came to visit us. As he left – immaculately dressed – to enter his taxi, a woman passer-by exclaimed: “He is larger than life.” He was just that – a unique and flamboyant personality – and friend.

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In memoriam Siegfried Pausewang (1937–2012)

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On Friday 13<sup>th</sup> April 2012, Dr. Siegfried Pausewang passed away, some months after he had been diagnosed with cancer. He had been actively, although with some reservation, planning for his continued work for Ethiopia and Ethiopian Studies up to only a few days before he died, and had unassumingly asked if the door could be kept open for the eventuality of his participation at the 18<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies in Dørre Dawa later this year, in a panel on land tenure and development in