

# Symposium:

## Transits, Trajectories, Invisible Networks: Dawit L. Petros, Italian Colonialism, and Chicago

**Friday, November 1, 2024,  
10:00am – 5:00 pm  
Film Row Cinema  
1104 S. Wabash Ave.  
Chicago, IL 60605**

Framed by the two commemorations of fascist aviator Italo Balbo in Chicago, the exhibition *Prospetto a Mare* is the latest chapter of Eritrean-born Canadian artist Dawit L. Petros's long-term investigation of the impact of Italian colonialism on North and East Africa—and its subsequent imprint on the visual cultures, populations, and built environments of Africa, Europe, and North America. This symposium—which draws its title from a pivotal series, *Istruzioni (Transits, Trajectories, Invisible Networks)*, on view in the exhibition—addresses the central themes in Petros's first museum exhibition in Chicago: the entanglements of the global legacies of Italian colonialism, the architectural imprint of colonial power at the two Chicago World's Fairs (1893 and 1933-1934), and Petros's aesthetic engagements with the history of Italian colonialism and migration in Africa.

### Welcome Introductions

10:00 - 10:10 am

Natasha Egan, Executive Director, MoCP

Karen Irvine, Chief Curator & Deputy Director, MoCP

### Session 1

*Itineraries of Dispersal: Global Legacies of Italian Colonialism*

10:15 - 11:45 am

While “mare nostrum” (“our sea”) was originally used by the ancient Romans to refer to the Mediterranean Sea, Italian nationalists in the twentieth century—who saw Italy as the successor state to the Roman Empire—attempted to revive the term. Benito Mussolini, in particular, drew on this historical basis for Italian imperialism for use in fascist propaganda and the consolidation of “Africa Orientale Italiana” (“Italian East Africa”), Italy's colony in the Horn of Africa. This panel takes up Petros's invitation to interrogate the legacies of this colonial project in North and East Africa as well as in the Italian diaspora elsewhere in the world. Additionally, it examines the imprint of Italian colonialism in the so-called “migrant crisis” in the Mediterranean Sea as well as in the analytic paradigm of the “Black Mediterranean”.

Teresa Fiore, Montclair State University

Cristina Lombardi-Diop, Loyola University Chicago

Angelica Pesarini, University of Toronto

Moderator: Yuan-Chih (Sreddy) Yen, Northwestern University/  
MoCP

**Lunch** 11:45 am - 1:00 pm

### Session 2

*Constant Retellings of the Future in the Past: Architectural Imprint of the Chicago World's Fairs*

1:00 - 2:30 pm

While the world's fair, also known as an international exposition, presented an arena to celebrate humanity's technological progress and industrial achievements to date, it was also often an avenue for nations to speculate on the future of society. Drawing on Petros's interest in how Italy used the 1933-34 fair in Chicago to promote a particular image of itself, this panel investigates the complicated legacies of the two world's fairs in Chicago (the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition and the 1933-34 A Century of Progress International Exposition) and the ways in which the ideologies of these fairs are coded into the city's built environment.

Onur Öztürk, Columbia College Chicago

Lisa Schrenk, University of Arizona

Moderator: Mikolaj Czerwinski, Columbia College Chicago

**Break** 2:30 - 2:45 pm

### Session 3

*Between Departures, Returns, and Excesses of Image: Dawit L. Petros in Conversation*

2:45 - 4:15 pm

Dawit L. Petros, School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Lindsay A. Caplan, Brown University

Moderator: Karen Irvine, MoCP

**Casual reception** 4:30 - 6:00 pm

@ MoCP (600 S Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60605)