



PAUL ONDITI: PIPES THAT BIND 2

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MONTAGUE CONTEMPORARY

526 WEST 26TH ST #621
NEW YORK, NY 1001
WWW.MONTAGUECONTEMPORARY.COM

PAUL ONDITI
B. 1980, Nairobi, Kenya

In his first solo show with Montague Contemporary "Pipes that Bind 2," Kenyan artist Paul Onditi presents new works made since the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Employing his signature, highly intensive techniques of layered oils, caustic acids, prints, and film, Onditi reimagines his long-standing "'Smokey'" series, evolving his protagonist from the passive, stoic capitalist to better reflect the existential crisis and uncertainty faced during contemporary life.

Paul Onditi's recent body of work is a reflection on the cyclical and connected world within which we live. Onditi's previous series, "Background," notably presented at the Kenya National Pavilion at the 57th Venice Biennale, addressed the structural challenges we face as a society - geopolitical, economic, social, environmental - and the cyclical nature of these routine upheavals. With the return of "Smokey to the tableau" we are afforded a glimpse into how Onditi sees the individual human experience in relation to these issues playing out in the background.



REVISITING SMOKEY

"Smokey" has always been Onditi's ultimate protagonist - a stoic gentleman, trudging along in his top hat and trench coat, briefcase in hand, making his way through sordid landscapes fulfilling his daily routine. Smokey has historically been inherently solitary, mysterious, and at odds with his surroundings - unperturbed by the shortcomings of his ecosystem or the machinations of the state within which he exists.

What makes this newest body of work so powerful is the coalescence of elements - of our aloof egotist, his inhospitable environment, and the invisible ley lines that connect them all together. Our protagonist no longer remains agnostic to what's happening around him, with a crescendo in each piece of Smokey being notably more taken with his environment.





"I LAY THERE PONDERING MY SITUATION, LOST IN THE DESERT, AND IN DANGER, NAKED BETWEEN SKY AND SAND AND STARS, WITHDRAWN BY TOO MUCH SILENCE FROM THE POLES OF MY LIFE."

ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY

ALL BEFORE ME 2

In "All Before Me 2," our gaze falls upon a man staring into the distance - arms upon hips, stripped bare, and lethargic in the face of his reality. Reminiscent of Lucian Freud, Onditi has transformed Smokey from a determined proletariat to mere mortal, exposing his raw state. What becomes painfully clear is that Smokey can no longer remain passive in the face of his environment - that there exists a co-dependency between individual and system, one that plays out in various dramas but remains an ever present reality.

In "Mediterranean Dream," the unmistakable challenges confronting refugees as they flee their harsh geopolitical circumstances is juxtaposed against the blighted destination and tainted passageway - evoking a plea for commonality and interdependence rather than the pursuit of isolationism.

Onditi's imaginative world has come full circle, portraying Smokey in a drama of societal and economic ley lines, interconnected systems that beg to be recognized but remain often hidden beneath the surface.



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Onditi's practice challenges our understanding of both our cultural topography and the physical world within which we exist. Addressing universal themes of pollution, climate change, fragmented and unequal societies, and the degradation of our natural planet, Onditi's practice eschews trendy identity politics to focus on endemic issues affecting all of humanity.

Working on his preferred canvas of digital polyester inkjet plates, Onditi is able to compose intricate and complex masterpieces portraying societal chaos and decay with a variety of oils, caustic acids, prints, and film. Seemingly intricate cityscapes give way to utter desolation, the degeneration aided by vibrant, almost radioactive luminosity suggesting our half-life is imminent. Moving away from his historically isolated and anonymized "smokey" character in his previous works, we now experience social movements at scale – with anonymous figures in the plural navigating the treacherous landscape.

Ultimately, Onditi's canvases remind the audience of what is at stake. Our collective existence is in the balance, the future malleable, the outcome uncertain.

PAUL ONDITI

Born: 1980, Kisumu, Kenya

Lives: Nairobi, Kenya

EDUCATION

2004 BFA, Hochschule für Gestaltung, Offenbach am Main, Germany

AWARDS AND RESIDENCIES

2018 Civitella Ranieri Fellowship, Umbria, Italy

2013 Ernst and Young Action, Museum für Angewandte Kunst in Frankfurt, Germany

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2018 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair, London, UK

2018 Cape Town Art Fair, Cape Town, South Africa

2018 Shifting Backgrounds, 50 Golborne, London, UK

2018 Dak'Art Biennale, Dakar, Senegal

2018 African Metropolis. An Imaginary City Show, MAXXI Museum, Rome, Italy

2017 In-House, Spriten Kunsthall, Telemark, Norway

2017 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair, New York, USA

2017 Background Effects, One Off Contemporary, Nairobi, Kenya

2016 VOLTA New York, USA

2014 Pipes that Bind, Faces in Places, Goethe Institut, Nairobi, Kenya

2014 Paul Onditi, Rezeption Gallery, Frankfurt, Germany

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2018 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair, London, UK

2017 57th Venice Biennale, Pavillion of the Republic of Kenya, Venice, Italy

2016 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair, London, UK

2016 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair, New York, USA

2015 Cape Town Art Fair, Cape Town, South Africa

2015 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair, London, UK

2010 Group Exhibition, Culture House, Porsgrunn, Norway

SELECTED COLLECTIONS

Robert Devereux Collection (UK) | Richard Branson Collection | East African Visual Arts Trust (Kenya)



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