



MONTAGUE CONTEMPORARY



**JESS ATIENO**

**OF LAND, BODY, AND WATER**

September 7, 2023 - October 21, 2023

OPENING RECEPTION: September 7, 2023, 6-8pm

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Montague Contemporary is delighted to present "Of Land, Body, and Water," our first solo exhibition of Kenyan artist Jess Atieno.

Her latest body of work results in a complex and nuanced exhibition that offers viewers an immersive journey into the duality of representation in the post-colonial context. Jess Atieno offers a fresh lens on African identity by probing the transient nature of visual imagery and how representation eludes photographic capture.

This initial component of the exhibition grapples with the limitations of visual mediums in truly capturing the essence and complexity of the subjects they intend to represent. The artworks therefore invite viewers to question and reconsider conventional means of representation, challenging the objective gaze of the camera and the assumptions it often perpetuates.

Concurrently, the exhibition explores the possibilities of reclaiming this representation, rooted in the transformative potential of the Swahili "Leso" fabrics, also known as khanga. Atieno views the leso/khanga as a metaphor for "reclaiming representation through iconography and remediation. The artist employs the leso's rich cultural tapestry to frame historical subjects in a way that empowers and reclaims their identity and representation.

The leso, a fabric deeply embedded in East African life and history, becomes an articulate narrative medium in Atieno's hands. Its multifaceted designs and proverbs (ujumbe) offer an avenue for interpersonal communication, particularly for women, in cultures that might otherwise restrain their voices. Atieno utilizes these core design aspects of the leso—"ujumbe," "pindo," and "mji"—to elevate her artistic narrative.

Born in Nairobi, Kenya, Jess Atieno is an influential voice in the contemporary African art scene, committed to exploring complex narratives of identity, place, and colonial history. She trained at the Asiko School of Art in Lagos before graduating with an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, USA. She is also the founder of the Nairobi Print Project, an open-source online library that focuses on African colonial and diaspora histories.

"Of Land, Body, and Water" opens on September 7th and will be open through October 21st, 2023. The exhibition is open to the public every week from Thursday through Saturday from 11AM to 6PM at 526 West 26th Street, 4th Floor.