



PRESS RELEASE

WHAT THE PAPER REMEMBERS

BLESSING NGOBENI

September 23, 2026 - November 7, 2026

NEW YORK — Montague Contemporary is pleased to present What the Paper Remembers, the first solo exhibition in New York by the South African artist Blessing Ngobeni. The exhibition opens on Wednesday 23 September with a reception from six until eight, on the eve of The Armory Show, and remains on view through 7 November 2026.

Ngobeni builds his figures out of newsprint, advertising and found paper, torn up and worked into acrylic. His material is the discarded record of a country's public life. A newspaper is supposed to hold the account of what happened, and these paintings ask what is left of that account once it has been shredded, and who did the shredding.

Ngobeni works across painting, collage, sculpture, video animation, sound installation and live performance. He is best known for large-scale symbolic paintings that indict the failure of post-apartheid promises of equality, drawing on Surrealism, Dadaism and Neo-Expressionism. Collage is a political method for him rather than a formal one, a way of showing how history gets edited and how corruption repeats itself. The paintings are dense and they reward standing close. Advertising slogans surface and submerge, faces assemble out of fragments of other faces, and the printed residue of daily life becomes the material of the figure. His ongoing Mirror Soft Life series looks at the social consciousness and inherited structures that keep oppressive systems in motion.

His titles place present-day extraction inside a much older colonial inheritance. The Song of the Chicotte takes its name from the hippopotamus-hide whip used in the Belgian Congo. Others include Enemy of Foe and Skeletons at Work. Artspace has named him among the most important African painters working today.



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Blessing Ngobeni (b. 1985, Tzaneen, South Africa) trained at the Artist Proof Studio in Newtown, Johannesburg, where he continues to live and work.

In 2019 he received the Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Visual Art, South Africa's most significant honour for an artist of his generation. The resulting exhibition, Ntsumi Ya Vutomi (Messenger of Experience), opened at the Standard Bank Gallery in Johannesburg and travelled to the Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town, where it was presented from November 2024 to February 2025. The exhibition toured nationally and spanned collage, painting, sculpture, installation and video animation.

Ngobeni has held solo exhibitions in Johannesburg, Cape Town and London, and presented a solo booth at Frieze Los Angeles in 2024. He has shown in New York in group presentations at Frieze New York, The Armory Show and AIPAD, but has not previously had a solo exhibition in the city. He was a finalist for the Norval Sovereign African Art Prize in 2024 and was included in Phaidon's Vitamin P3: New Perspectives in Painting in 2016. Group exhibitions include Art Basel Miami Beach, Frieze New York, The Armory Show, EXPO Chicago, UNTITLED Miami, AIPAD, and The Invisible Exhibition II at The Centre for the Less Good Idea, Johannesburg.

His work is held in the collections of the Iziko South African National Gallery, the Johannesburg Art Gallery, the Pérez Art Museum Miami, and the FirstRand Group and SAFFCA collections, as well as in private collections internationally, including those of Beyoncé Knowles-Carter and Shawn "Jay-Z" Carter.

He has been featured in the Mail & Guardian, the Sunday Times, Drum, ARTnews, Artnet News, Reuters, SABC News and Condé Nast House & Garden. Residencies include the Headlands Center for the Arts, San Francisco, the Cleveland Foundation's Creative Fusion programme, and the Bag Factory, Johannesburg.

In 2016 Ngobeni founded the Blessing Ngobeni Art Prize, an annual award for South African artists between eighteen and thirty-five who have neither gallery representation nor a solo exhibition to their name. Recipients are given a funded studio residency, materials, mentorship and a solo presentation. It amounts to a year of support at the stage when support is hardest to find. Nearly a decade on it is one of the most substantial artist-led initiatives in South Africa, funded and run by the artist himself.



ABOUT MONTAGUE CONTEMPORARY

With over a decade of experience living and/or working in over 30 African countries, Montague Contemporary recognizes the importance of changing the narrative of African art and of building a new shared counter-history. By championing unique perspectives and diverse identities in an accessible and engaging way, we aim to foster a new dialogue between audience and artist both locally and abroad.

Through innovative shared experiences, international fairs, and dedicated group and solo shows, we hope to continue to challenge the traditional art canons and bring increased exposure to the diverse and nuanced field of emerging contemporary African art.

Many of the gallery's artists have shown as part of biennale's such as the Venice Biennale, Dakar Biennale, the Kampala Art Biennale, the Kochi Biennale, Lagos Photo, and the Sao Paulo Biennale; the gallery has shown at a variety of art fairs including NADA New York (2026); 1-54 London (2020/2021), 1-54 Art Fair NY (2022), AAKA Art Fair Pairs (2022), EXPO Chicago (2022/2023/2024/2025), SCOPE Art Fair Miami (2022). Gallery artists are also included in the permanent collections of important public collections including The British Museum, The Brooklyn Museum, The High Museum, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), the Rockefeller Foundation, The Smithsonian Museum of African Art, the Studio Museum Harlem, the Museum of Contemporary Art Lyon, the ZEITZ MOCAA, New Orleans Museum of Art, St. Louis Museum of Art, among many others.

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