

# WILLIAM KENTRIDGE

from January 29 to April 11, 1999

The South African artist William Kentridge (Johannesburg, 1955) presents in this exhibition a selection of works produced over the last ten years. Kentridge, who studied politics and African culture, has in his professional life regularly alternated between the practice of drawing and print-making and incursions into the world of theatre, in the capacities of actor, writer and director. His work is a personal and expressive attempt to engage with the nature of the human emotions and memory, and the relationship between desire, ethics and responsibility. His works deal with ill-treatment and suffering, guilt and confession, domination and emancipation in our post-colonial age at the end of the 20th century. While it raises issues that bear on the human condition in general, Kentridge's art is particularly rooted in his place of origin, a country marked by racial divisions and the laws of apartheid. Nevertheless, his works do not attempt to "illustrate" apartheid; rather they cannot escape its insistent claim to all aspects of life in South Africa.

This exhibition presents a series of animated films, one of the central aspects of Kentridge's artistic output. Kentridge, who acknowledges the influence of Goya, Hogarth and Beckmann on his drawing, has evolved his own special animation technique: this consists in creating charcoal and pastel drawings, which he goes on to modify by rubbing out, adding to and re-working the different elements. Each stage of the process is then filmed for a few seconds using a 16 mm –in the early films– or 35 mm –in more recent films– camera. He is thus able to work with a few dozen drawings instead of the thousands usually required to make an animated film.

On the basis of this technique –in which traces of the working process remain visible in the drawings (drawings which at the same time conceal their history)– effectively captures the passage of time and the stratification of memory.

## Films in the exhibition:

*Ubu tells the truth*, 1997 (8 min.)

This video combines animated drawing and archival film footage relating to the bloody events of the last thirty years of South African history. The work was originally part of the stage production *Ubu and the Truth Commission* which Kentridge created in collaboration with the Handspring Puppet Company in 1997. The work is based on Alfred Jarry's character, Ubu, in combination with documentary evidence drawn from the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, set up in South Africa in 1996 to investigate human rights abuses under the apartheid regime.

## Films of Soho Eckstein: the city

*Johannesburg, 2nd Greatest City after Paris*, 1989 (8 min. 2 sec.)

*Monument*, 1990 (3 min. 11 sec.)

*Mine*, 1991 (5 min. 50 sec.)

These are the earliest of a series of animated films which Kentridge began making in 1989, in which the central character is Soho Eckstein. The series shows us aspects of the life of Eckstein, a wealthy Johannesburg property developer, and his *alter ego* Felix Teitlebaum, while at the same time reflecting South Africa's historic period of transition.

## Films of Soho Eckstein: ageing

*Sobriety, Obesity and Growing Old*, 1991 (8 min. 22 sec.)

*WEIGHING... and WANTING*, 1998 (6 min. 20 sec.)

Another two films from the Soho Eckstein series. The first was made shortly after the decriminalization of political organizations in South Africa and shows great crowds of people demonstrating in the streets of Johannesburg. The gas mask which Soho Eckstein wears calls to mind the ones seen in television reports from the Gulf War. *WEIGHING... and WANTING*, made six years later, deals with Soho Eckstein's efforts to achieve domestic and personal harmony in the midst of his public ambitions.

## Films of Soho Eckstein: exile

*Felix in Exile*, 1994 (8 min. 43 sec.)

*History of the Main Complaint*, 1996 (5 min. 50 sec.)

*Felix in Exile* was made just before the first general elections in South Africa, in 1994. Kentridge is reflecting here on the loss of historical memory, on how memory disappears in the same way that the landscape erases the marks of the events of which it has been the setting, and asking how the sense of the historic past can be retained. *History of the Main Complaint* was made at the time of the first public sessions of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and addresses issues of personal and historical responsibility and guilt.

*Ulisse: ECHO scan slide bottle*, 1998.

The material shown in this triptych projection is taken from the opera *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse*—itself based on Monteverdi's *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* (1640)—which Kentridge produced in collaboration with the Handspring Puppet Company in 1998. The body imaging techniques of modern medicine reveal the hidden images of the insides of our bodies. These provide clues to the frailties of the spirit, and throw into question our desperate trust in the surface, in appearances.

The exhibition also includes a selection of drawings used in the making of the films or created on the basis of these, as well as documentary or promotional videos of the stage productions *Woyzeck on the Highveld* (1992), *Faustus in Africa!* (1995), *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1997) and the opera *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse* (1998).

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### Museum hours

11 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. daily

Closed Tuesday

10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Saturday

10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sunday and holidays

### Guided tours

Saturday, at 6 p.m.

Sunday and holidays, at 11 a.m.

### Group visits

Reservations: Tel. 934 121 413

Working days (except Tuesday),

10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

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