



For Immediate Release

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SFMOMA PRESENTS PREMIERE OF *WILLIAM KENTRIDGE: FIVE THEMES* MAJOR SURVEY MARKS DEBUT OF ARTIST'S MOST RECENT WORK

**Exhibition to Travel to Fort Worth, West Palm Beach, New York, Paris, Vienna,
Jerusalem, and Amsterdam in 2009–2011**

Multimedia Opera and Catalogue with DVD to Accompany SFMOMA Presentation

William Kentridge: Five Themes, a comprehensive survey of the contemporary South African artist's work, will premiere at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) on March 14, 2009. Featuring more than 75 works in a range of media—including animated films, drawings, prints, theater models, sculptures, and books—the exhibition is co-organized by SFMOMA and the Norton Museum of Art in West Palm Beach, Florida. The San Francisco presentation, overseen by SFMOMA Curator of Media Arts Rudolf Frieling, will be on view through May 31, 2009.

Curated by Mark Rosenthal, adjunct curator of modern art at the Norton Museum of Art, in close collaboration with the artist, the exhibition explores five primary themes that have engaged Kentridge over the past three decades. Although the exhibition highlights projects completed since 2000 (many of which have not been seen in the United States), it will also present, for the first time, Kentridge's most recent work alongside his earlier projects from the 1980s and 1990s—revealing as never before the full arc of his distinguished career.

Following its debut at SFMOMA, the survey will travel to the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, the Norton Museum of Art, and The Museum of Modern Art in New York. Plans for the European tour—which will tentatively include Galerie nationale du Jeu de Paume in Paris, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the Albertina Museum in Vienna, and the Israel Museum in Jerusalem—are being finalized. Accompanying the exhibition is a richly illustrated catalogue, complete with a DVD produced by the artist for this special occasion. The San Francisco presentation of *William Kentridge: Five Themes* is made possible by the generous support of the Koret Foundation and Doris and Donald Fisher.

“William Kentridge is one of today's most influential artists, and with this exhibition, SFMOMA continues its commitment to bringing such groundbreaking artists as Olafur Eliasson, Richard Tuttle, and Jeff Wall to local and international audiences,” says SFMOMA Director Neal Benezra, who cocurated the last major retrospective of the artist's work in the United States in 2001. “Although Kentridge is primarily recognized for his animated films, he



William Kentridge, Drawing for *II Sole 24 Ore (World Walking)*, 2007; Collection of Doris and Donald Fisher

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has devoted most of his time to making works on paper. The drawn line is completely inseparable from his work in other media, informing everything he creates. His transformation of drawing into animated film reflects his deep interest in how content evolves from process, how meaning accrues through making.”

Exhibition curator Rosenthal adds, “Even as Kentridge has established his reputation as a master draftsman, printmaker, and one of the preeminent artist–filmmakers of our time, he has also expanded the traditional notion of political art, evolving the genre from a conventional depiction of horrors to a more nuanced portrayal of the psychological effects of political events upon those who observe them, whether they be perpetrators, victims, or onlookers.”

Born in 1955 in Johannesburg, where he continues to live and work, Kentridge has earned international acclaim for his interdisciplinary practice, which often fuses drawing, film, and theater. Known for engaging with the social landscape and political background of his native South Africa, he has produced a searing body of work that explores themes of colonial oppression and social conflict, loss and reconciliation, and the ephemeral nature of both personal and cultural memory.

Kentridge first gained recognition in 1997, when his work was included in *Documenta X* in Kassel, Germany, and in the Johannesburg and Havana Biennials, which were followed by prominent solo exhibitions internationally. His art was widely introduced to American audiences in 2001 through a traveling retrospective—cocurated by Neal Benezra when he served as deputy director of the Art Institute of Chicago—which primarily included works made before 2000. *William Kentridge: Five Themes* brings viewers up to date on the artist’s work over the past decade, exploring how his subject matter has evolved from the specific context of South Africa to more universal stories. In recent years, Kentridge has dramatically expanded both the scope of his projects (such as recent full-scale opera productions) and their thematic concerns, which now include his own studio practice, colonialism in Namibia and Ethiopia, and the cultural history of postrevolutionary Russia. His newer work is based on an intensive exploration of themes connected to his own life experience, as well as the political and social issues that most concern him.

Although his hand-drawn animations are often described as films, Kentridge himself prefers to call them “drawings for projection.” He makes them using a distinctive technique in which he painstakingly creates, erases, and reworks charcoal drawings that are photographed and projected as moving image. Movement is generated within the image, by the artist’s hand; the camera serves merely to record its progression. As such, the animations explore a tension between material object and time-based performance, uniquely capturing the artist’s working process while telling poignant and politically urgent stories.

Concerning the artist’s innovative film installations of the past ten years, Rudolf Frieling adds: “Kentridge has been considered primarily as an artist who draws for projections. Yet his recent installation-based films explore an expanded cinema space and question the very foundation of what it means to produce and perceive a moving image.”

In light of SFMOMA’s history with Kentridge—in 2004 the museum acquired the artist’s landmark film *Tide Table* (2003) and a set of related drawings—and the rich holdings of his work in private Bay Area collections, the occasion to present the first major exhibition of his work in San Francisco has particular resonance and reflects the museum’s ongoing commitment to his art. In conjunction with the exhibition, SFMOMA will bring the artist’s multimedia opera *The Return of Ulysses* to San Francisco for performances at Project Artaud Theater from March 25

through 29, 2009. Kentridge will also present his lecture-format solo performance *I am not me, the horse is not mine* at SFMOMA on March 14, 2009.

The Five Themes

“Parcours d’Atelier: Artist in the Studio”

The first section of the exhibition examines a crucial turning point in Kentridge’s work, one in which his own art practice became a subject. According to the artist, many of these projects are meant to reflect the “invisible work that must be done” before beginning a drawing, film, or sculpture. This theme is epitomized by the large-scale multiscreen projection *7 Fragments for Georges Méliès* (2003), an homage to the early French film director, who, like Kentridge, often combined performance with drawing. The suite of seven films—each depicting Kentridge at work in his studio or interacting with his creations—has only been shown once before in the United States and will be accompanied by a rarely seen group of related drawings, forming an intimate portrayal of the artist’s process.

“Thick Time: Soho and Felix”

A second section of the exhibition is dedicated to Kentridge’s best-known fictional characters, Soho Eckstein, a domineering industrialist and real estate developer whose troubled conscience reflects certain miens of contemporary South Africa, and his sensitive alter ego, Felix Teitlebaum, who pines for Soho’s wife and often functions as a surrogate for the artist himself. The centerpiece of this section, an ongoing work entitled *9 Drawings for Projection*, comprises nine short animated films: *Johannesburg, 2nd Greatest City after Paris* (1989), *Monument* (1990), *Sobriety, Obesity & Growing Old* (1991), *Mine* (1991), *Felix in Exile* (1994), *History of the Main Complaint* (1996), *WEIGHING . . . and WANTING* (1998), *Stereoscope* (1999), and *Tide Table* (2003). These projections, along with a key selection of related drawings, follow the lives of Soho and Felix as they struggle to navigate the political and social climate of Johannesburg during the final decade of apartheid. According to Kentridge, the Soho and Felix films were made without a script or storyboards and are largely about his own process of discovery.

“Occasional and Residual Hope: Ubu and the Procession”

In 1975 Kentridge acted in *Ubu Rex* (an adaptation of *Ubu Roi*, Alfred Jarry’s satire about a corrupt and cowardly despot), and he subsequently devoted a large body of work to the play. He began with a series of eight etchings, collectively entitled *Ubu Tells the Truth* (1996), and in 1997 made an animated film of the same name, as well as a number of related drawings. These works also deal with the South African experience, specifically addressing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings set up by the nation’s government in 1995 to investigate human rights abuses during apartheid. Other highlights in this grouping include the film *Shadow Procession* (1999), in which Kentridge first utilizes techniques of shadow theater and jointed-paper figures; the multipanel collage *Portage* (2000); a large charcoal-and-pastel-on-paper work entitled *Arc Procession (Smoke, Ashes, Fable)* (1990); and some of the artist’s rough-hewn bronze sculptures.

“Sarastro and the Master’s Voice: The Magic Flute”

A selection of Kentridge’s drawings, films, and theater models inspired by his 2005 production of the Mozart opera *The Magic Flute* for La Monnaie, the leading opera house in Belgium, will be a highlight of the exhibition. The artist’s video projection *Learning the Flute* (2003), which started the *Flute* project, shifts between images of black charcoal drawings on white paper and white chalk drawings projected onto a blackboard, forming a meditation on darkness and light. *Preparing the Flute* (2005) was created as a large-scale maquette within which to test projections central to the production of the opera. Another theater model, *Black Box/Chambre Noire* (2006), which has never been seen in the United States, addresses the opera’s themes, specifically through an examination of the colonial war of 1904 in German South-West Africa, and of the genocide of the Herero people. *What Will Come (has already come)* (2007), a consideration of colonialism in Ethiopia, presents an anamorphic film installation in which intentionally distorted images projected onto a tabletop right themselves only when reflected in a cylindrical mirror. This work was recently acquired, under the guidance of Rosenthal, by the Norton Museum of Art.

“Learning from the Absurd: The Nose”

The fifth section comprises a multichannel projection made in preparation for Kentridge’s forthcoming staging of *The Nose*, a Metropolitan Opera production that will premiere in New York in March 2010. *The Nose*—a 1930 Dmitri Shostakovich opera based on Nikolai Gogol’s absurdist short story of 1836—concerns a Russian official whose nose disappears from his face, only to turn up, in uniform, as a higher-ranking official moving in more respected circles. Kentridge’s related work, *I am not me, the horse is not mine* (2008), on view in the United States for the first time, is a room-size installation of projected films that use Gogol’s story as the basis for examining Russian modernism and the suppression of the Russian avant-garde in the 1920s and 1930s.

Related Performances

Acknowledging the profound importance of theatrical work in Kentridge’s oeuvre, SFMOMA will bring the artist’s opera *The Return of Ulysses* to San Francisco in conjunction with the exhibition. First performed in Brussels in 1998, Kentridge’s acclaimed reinterpretation of Claudio Monteverdi’s classic 1640 opera (based on Homer’s epic poem) is transposed to a mid-20th-century Johannesburg setting. This limited-engagement performance features live actors and musicians, as well as 13 life-size, artisan-crafted wooden puppets and projections of Kentridge’s animated charcoal drawings. *The Return of Ulysses* will run at Project Artaud Theater from Tuesday, March 24, through Saturday, March 28 (preview March 24, opening March 25), and is a production of Pacific Operaworks, in Seattle, incorporating puppeteers from Kentridge’s longtime collaborator, the Handspring Puppet Company of Cape Town, in South Africa.

In a special opening-night event on March 14, Kentridge will present a lecture-format solo performance of *I am not me, the horse is not mine*, which premiered at the 16th Biennale of Sydney in June 2008 (and shares the same title of the related multichannel projection making its U.S. debut with the exhibition). This live performance focuses on the development process of Kentridge’s upcoming opera production, *The Nose*.

Definitive Publication with Companion DVD

To coincide with the exhibition, SFMOMA and the Norton Museum of Art, in association with Yale University Press, will publish a richly illustrated catalogue (hardcover, \$50). In the catalogue's principal essay, exhibition curator Mark Rosenthal presents a portrait of the artist, showing the interrelationship between aspects of Kentridge's character and the protagonists that populate his work. Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, chief curator at the Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art, examines the artist's themes and iconography in closer detail, addressing Kentridge's working methods as he moves freely between disciplines. Rudolf Frieling demonstrates that although Kentridge is not typically discussed as an installation artist, there are compelling reasons to consider him as such. Cornelia H. Butler, Judith B. Hecker, and Klaus Biesenbach, curators at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, explore the subject of performance in Kentridge's work. Finally, a conversation between Kentridge and Michael Auping, chief curator at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, focuses on the artist's drawing practice. In addition, the artist has written texts to introduce each of the book's five plate sections.

For the first time, Kentridge will produce a DVD for distribution with the publication, making the catalogue unique among existing literature on the artist. Combining intimate studio footage of the artist at work with fragments from significant film projects, the DVD offers a fascinating look at how Kentridge's ideas evolve from raw concept to finished work.

International Tour Schedule

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art • March 14 through May 31, 2009
Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth • July 11 through September 27, 2009
Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach • November 7, 2009 through January 17, 2010
The Museum of Modern Art, New York • February 28 through May 17, 2010
Galerie nationale du Jeu de Paume, Paris • July 5 through September 26, 2010
Albertina Museum, Vienna • October 30, 2010 through January 30, 2011
Israel Museum, Jerusalem • March 5 through May 29, 2011
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam • July 7 through October 2, 2011

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Museum hours: Open daily (except Wednesdays): 11 a.m. to 5:45 p.m.; open late Thursdays, until 8:45 p.m. Summer hours (Memorial Day to Labor Day): Open at 10 a.m. Closed Wednesdays and the following public holidays: New Year's Day, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Christmas. The Museum is open the Wednesday between Christmas and New Year's Day.

Koret Visitor Education Center: Open daily (except Wednesdays): 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; open late Thursdays, until 8:30 p.m. Summer hours: Open at 10 a.m.

Admission prices: Adults \$12.50; seniors \$8; students \$7. SFMOMA members and children 12 and under are admitted free. Thursday evenings after 6 p.m. admission is half-price. The first Tuesday of each month admission is free.

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Visit our website at www.sfmoma.org or call 415.357.4000 for more information.

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