A Universal Archive
William Kentridge as Printmaker
Research pack
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Front cover image:

William Kentridge
Atlas Procession, 2000
Etching, aquatint and drypoint
158x108cm
Courtesy David Krut Fine Art, New York and London
© The artist and David Krut Fine Art, New York and Johannesburg 2012
How to use this pack

This pack has been designed to provide background and contextual information about the work of William Kentridge to accompany the Universal Archive exhibition *William Kentridge as Printmaker*. The information provided is intended to support the creation of educational activities and interpretation materials specific to each receiving venue.

The pack provides biographical information about Kentridge and a summary of the recent history of South Africa to which his work makes reference. It offers insight into some key figures and movements in the history of printmaking from whom Kentridge has drawn inspiration, as well as a glossary that explains the different printmaking techniques used in his work. The pack gives a brief resume of Kentridge’s multidisciplinary practice which ranges across animated film, theatre, drawing and sculpture. Finally, it draws together some of the themes and motifs that appear regularly throughout Kentridge’s work including in many of the prints included in the exhibition. Much has been written about Kentridge’s work, and suggestions for further reading are given at the end of the pack, along with a list of works included in the exhibition.

It is hoped that this range of material will provide a wide variety of starting points for the development of educational programmes and activities.

This research pack is intended as a private resource. Up to four copies may be made for internal educational purposes only, not for further distribution or sale.

The pack was commissioned by the Learning and Participation Team at Southbank Centre. It was researched and written by Fiona Godfrey (www.fionagodfrey.org.uk).

For further information about the exhibition and to obtain images please contact chelsea.pettitt@southbankcentre.co.uk.
About the exhibition

William Kentridge is one of South Africa’s pre-eminent artists, internationally acclaimed for his films, drawings, theatre and opera productions. He is also an innovative and prolific printmaker. He studied etching at the Johannesburg Art Foundation, and printmaking has remained central to his work ever since. In the past two and a half decades he has produced more than 400 prints, including etchings, engravings, aquatints, silkscreens, linocuts and lithographs, often experimenting with challenging formats and combinations of techniques.

Many of his key themes are explored in his prints and he has said that there have been ‘many projects that have ended up as either a piece of theatre or an animated film which have their origins in printmaking’. ¹

This major exhibition includes nearly one hundred prints in all media, from 1988 to the present, with a stress on experimental and serial works. Kentridge has been working on a new series of prints which is included and shown here for the first time. His distinctive use of light and shadow and silhouettes, his concern with memory and perspective, and his absorption in literary texts, are all strongly in evidence. The prints range in scale from intimate etchings and drypoints to linocuts measuring 2.5 metres high.

Exhibition tour dates

The Bluecoat, Liverpool 7 December 2012 - 3 February 2013
Mac, Birmingham 16 March - 2 June 2013
QUAD, Derby 15 June – 18 August 2013

William Kentridge biography

William Kentridge was born in Johannesburg, South Africa in 1955 into a white, Jewish family. His mother co-founded a leading law firm and his father Sydney was a prominent lawyer in the anti-apartheid movement. He took on civil rights cases against the apartheid system, including representing the family of Steve Biko who died in police custody in 1977.

Kentridge attended school in Johannesburg. During this time, he was influenced by his discovery of the artist Dumile Feni.

‘...the biggest influence was this man called Dumilia (sic). By the time I was a student he had already gone to New York. When I was an adolescent - about fourteen or fifteen - he worked at the house with Bill Ainslie, the teacher that I had. I used to go there in the evenings for art lessons and I'd see Dumilia working in the house, working on large figurative charcoal drawings. That, for me, was a revelation of what those drawings could be, what you could do with that medium. He was very important."²

Kentridge studied for a BA in Politics and African studies at the University Witwatersrand in Johannesburg between 1973 and 1976 and then went on to study for a Diploma in Fine Arts at the Johannesburg Art Foundation, a private art school founded by Bill Ainslie. He has described how, in contrast to following his parents into law, he was attracted to the world of art.

² Interview with William Kentridge during studio visit by One People Voice orchestra (2001) www.onepeople.com
'I think there are different ways of engaging (with the world). My parents were both very good lawyers. So in one sense, in an immediate way, it seemed impossible to follow their footsteps, those were too large. But it also became important for me to find my own voice, and the only way to do that was to find an opinion or a meaning that was not subject to cross-examination, that could not be demolished through rational argument because its rationale was different. Its way of being didn’t have to do with the same analytic arrival at premises and conclusions, it had to do much more with intuitions of images and seeing whether once one’s image was made, there were sets of associations sparked by that image, and I hoped that that was a way of arriving at a view of the world. So there was a connection between my parents doing law and me doing art, but not a very clear one.'

The main focus of Kentridge’s art training was on etching. His describes how his relationship with printmaking and drawing grew during his time at art college.

‘When I started art school, painting on canvas was the norm and was what I spent my days doing, and I was miserable at it. Both miserable psychologically — trying to do it — and very bad at it. So it was an enormous relief (and pleasure) to suddenly discover the medium of etching. This was a medium in which it was legitimate to use no colour, to work monochromatically. And having started etching I could move forward into drawing, specifically into drawing in charcoal, which I began a few years later as an extension of printmaking.'

From 1975 onwards, Kentridge was involved in making drawings and prints, including making posters for black trade unions, student protests and experimental plays. In November 1978 he participated in Exhibition, an exhibition of work by artists linked to Bill Ainslie’s workshop, at Gallery 101 in Johannesburg. In 1979 and 1981, Kentridge had solo exhibitions at the gallery that formed part of the Market Theatre complex in Newtown; an area of Johannesburg that was the centre of the arts resistance struggle against apartheid. Both of these exhibitions addressed social issues and commented on the bourgeois existence of white South Africans in the context of apartheid.

During this time he also returned to the art college to teach etching. However, after a year or so, he began to feel he didn’t have the right to be an artist. From 1975 onwards Kentridge had been involved in both acting and directing at Johannesburg’s Junction Avenue Theatre Company. His disenchantment with attempting to work as an artist was fuelled by the tensions of apartheid and he left South Africa in the early 1980s to study mime and theatre at L’Ecole Internationale de Theatre Jacques Lecoq in Paris. Here he concluded that he wasn’t destined to become an actor either, so he returned to South Africa with the intention of becoming a filmmaker and in 1985 became a founding member of the Free Filmmakers Co-operative.

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3 Interview with William Kentridge for PBS Newshour (2010) 
http://www.pbs.org/newshour/art/blog/2010/10/conversation-william-kentridge.html

4 HECKER, JUDITH B; KENTRIDGE, WILLIAM William Kentridge: Trace - Prints from The Museum of Modern Art, Museum of Modern Art 2001

5 Interview with William Kentridge for PBS Newshour (2010) 
http://www.pbs.org/newshour/art/blog/2010/10/conversation-william-kentridge.html
Ultimately, frustrated by the poor state of the filmmaking industry in South Africa, it was to art that he returned. Although unsure of exactly what direction this would take, Kentridge continued to draw and make prints during this period, while he worked out (in his own words) what it was he would become; what he really wanted to do. In 1986 he designed a screen-print poster *Johannesburg – 100 Years of Easy Living – What Cause to Celebrate*, protesting against the 100 year celebrations of the city’s history. The poster was never printed due to the paucity of printmaking facilities. However, shortly after this, he began working with The Caversham Press, a newly established professional print workshop in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands and the first independent fine art printmaking studio to be established in South Africa. Here he was able to renew his interest in printmaking, and to begin working collaboratively, notably with Robert Hodgins and Deborah Bell, two other artists based in Johannesburg.

In 1987 Kentridge had his first solo show in London. A few years later, in 1989, he began making the short animated films for which he is perhaps most famous; photographing his charcoal drawings with a video camera and altering them frame by frame to create an evolving narrative.

In 1992 he met with curator David Krut during a visit to Johannesburg. Through this meeting he started working with the 107 Print Workshop in Wiltshire and after this increasingly began to exhibit abroad and work with printmaking facilities outside of South Africa. In the same year he began another collaborative relationship, this time with the Handspring Puppet Company, a South African puppet performance and design company established in 1981. The company are known in the UK for their creation of life-sized horse puppets for the production *War Horse*. This led him back into the world of performance, and further into the multi-disciplinary approach that would come to typify his work.

In 1996, in the context of the tense period following South Africa’s first democratic elections, a series of etchings *Ubu tells the truth* (1996-7) based on Alfred Jarry’s absurdist play *Ubu Roi* (1896) led to a video animation by the same name, and thence to the development of the performance piece *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1997), another collaboration with the Handspring Puppet Company and with writer Jane Taylor.

Kentridge exhibited at Documenta X in Kassel in 1997 with two of his animated films made from charcoal drawings. *Felix in Exile* (1994) and *History of the Main*

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Complaint (1996) both depict aspects of South Africa through the semi-autobiographical characters, Soho Eckstein and Felix Teitlebaum.

In 1998, Kentridge again collaborated with the Handspring Puppet Company on a production of Monteverdi’s opera Il Ritorno di Ulisse in Patria (The Return of Ulysses to his Homeland). This combined projections of his animated charcoal drawings with large wooden puppets operated by performing opera singers.

Kentridge’s work was included in the 24th São Paulo Biennial in 1998 and in and the Venice Biennale in 1999. In the same year, he received the Carnegie Prize for his animated film Stereoscope (1999).

In 2005, Kentridge’s work was again shown at the Venice Biennale. In the same year, he took his performance work to a larger scale when he directed and designed a production of Mozart’s The Magic Flute (1791). In this production, drawings in black and white are projected over the performers on stage.

In 2010 Kentridge directed and designed a production of Shostokovich’s opera The Nose (1927-28). The opera is based on Gogol’s story of the same name in which a man becomes estranged from his own nose. The nose then rises quickly to a higher social status than the man enjoys. In his production, Kentridge uses Gogol’s story to examine the communist government’s oppression of the Russian avant-garde. The production involves large-scale projections of Kentridge’s drawings and paper cuts. In several scenes, Kentridge’s large cut-out nose appears superimposed over images from newspapers and Soviet propaganda, as well over archive footage of military parades and performances.

Over the years, Kentridge has been included in numerous group exhibitions and has had solo exhibitions in major international cities worldwide including London, Moscow, New York, San Francisco, Sydney and Johannesburg. His work continues to be typified by the very wide range of media that he works with, and by the way in which he freely combines drawing, printmaking, collage, animation, performance, sculpture, music, film and photography.

‘For many years, I followed the good advice of friends saying, “You have to specialize. If you try to do all these different things, you’ll just be an amateur and a dilettante; each one has its own specific set of skills, and traditions, and history. Just
“do drawing, or just do filmmaking, or just do theatre.” I tried unsuccessfully to follow that advice, which seemed very sound, and then discovered that I was both working making drawings and making a piece of theatre with some puppeteers, and there was projection behind it, and at a certain point I gave up. I said, “All right, I tried as hard as I can to just do one thing,” but temperamentally, it doesn’t work, and the only hope is that the sum of the parts will be more than the individual items.\footnote{Interview with William Kentridge for the exhibition Other Faces, Marian Goodman Gallery, New York 2001 \url{http://twi-ny.com/blog/2011/05/16/twi-ny-talk-william-kentridge/}}

Kentridge had the opportunity to talk about the diversity of his work and the interplay between the disciplines he inhabits when he was invited to deliver the prestigious Norton lectures for Harvard University in 2012.\footnote{Videos of all six Norton lectures can be viewed at \url{http://mahindrahumanities.fas.harvard.edu/content/norton-lectures}}

Kentridge is represented by the Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, Annandale Galleries, Sydney and Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg/Cape Town. He lives in Johannesburg with his wife, Dr Anne Stanwix. They have three children; two daughters and a son.

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\textbf{William Kentridge hand colouring prints at the David Krut Print Workshop, Johannesburg 2012}  
\textit{Photo courtesy David Krut Print Workshop}
South African context

Kentridge was born into an era when apartheid was at its height in South Africa. During the 1950s a number of laws had been passed that strengthened the apartheid infrastructure, classifying South African citizens into racial groups, using this system to determine where people would live and segregating amenities and services. In general, superior amenities were reserved for whites, including a better education and medical system. With the emergence of the anti-apartheid movement, many other laws were passed during this time with the aim of preventing resistance.

Under the ‘homeland’ system, a policy of resettlement forced the removal of racial groups to their designated homeland areas or into townships designed to house those working in the cities. The most famous of these resettlements involved around 60,000 people being moved into Soweto, a new township area 18 miles outside Johannesburg. As was true of many of the township areas, Soweto was characterised by poor housing, overcrowding, high unemployment and an inadequate infrastructure. Soweto became central in the resistance movement and the ongoing struggles of the anti-apartheid African National Congress (ANC), with ANC leader Nelson Mandela numbering amongst its now famous residents.

1976 saw an event now known as the Soweto uprising. This was a student led response to the ‘Afrikaans Medium Decree’ of 1974 which forced all black schools to teach in the languages of Afrikaans and English; both regarded as the languages of the oppressive apartheid regime. Thousands of students from a number of schools joined the protest. The police response was to shoot many of the protesting students. Many white South African citizens were outraged at the government’s actions in Soweto, and joined the protests. The official figure of protestors who were shot is 176. Other estimates put the number at around 600.

Kentridge was working at Johannesburg’s Junction Avenue Theatre Company at the time. He has spoken about his inner conflict during this time.

‘With the theatre company I was working with at the time, there was a choice at a certain point. I mean in 1976, when the Soweto uprising started, we had a choice. Do we continue with the theatre that we’re making, or do we go to the barricades, so to speak. And the answer is, we kept on working with the theatre, and some of us spent more or less time at different barricades, and made more or less commitment to political action. But I suppose the decision for me, while I kept on at the studio and kept on working, was an important one, understanding that that’s where my life and work was. I would not have been a good politician, and an even worse soldier. I’d been doing drawings, and I’d been doing posters for trade unions, and then at a certain point there was too big a gap between the work I was doing for myself, and the work I was doing on behalf of the other. And at a certain point I thought ‘no, there is bad faith somewhere if they’re so different’. So I stopped drawing, I gave up being an artist, I left South Africa. I came to Paris to study theatre, thinking I was going to be an actor, discovered that I couldn’t be a actor, went back to South Africa, tried to work in film, discovered that I couldn’t work in the film industry: it was too terrible, found I was back doing drawings, but very different drawings, drawings that were done for myself without a sense of how they would fit into the larger struggle inside South Africa. They were a retreat from it, into the world of the studio. And it was only there, when I was working inside the studio, that they started having a connection,
not just to me, but to the outside world of South Africa. So it was a kind of a journey from close political involvement, to no political involvement, to working in the studio and in a different way finding a connection.  

It was not until 1994 that the era of apartheid formally came to end, when all South Africans voted for the first time and the ANC party was voted to power. The years leading up to this and the years that followed were times of great tension and disquiet.

Another influential aspect of the country’s history that Kentridge was born into was the cultural boycott. This global movement attempted to isolate South Africa culturally, academically and in sport. From the 1960s onwards the international world increasingly declared their support for severing cultural links with South Africa. However, this movement itself was subject to certain ambiguities and contradictions. The original focus of the boycott was on isolating those artists and arts organisations who allowed their work to be performed before racially segregated audiences. In reality however, the boycott became much more wide-ranging. So for example, the Market Theatre of Johannesburg, at which Kentridge’s early work was shown, and which was actively de-segregated and outspokenly anti-apartheid, was also denied international contact. The boycott was famously challenged by the musician Paul Simon when he chose to collaborate with a number of South African musicians on the album *Graceland* (1986).

For Kentridge, the isolation imposed by the boycott was in some ways helpful, in that it allowed him freedom to continue working on his charcoal drawings without concern for whether they would fit into the context of the international world of contemporary art. The situation also encouraged fruitful collaborations among the art community within South Africa, which Kentridge has continued to expand on internationally throughout his work.

The particularities of Kentridge’s personal history are reflected in the fact that his work has never been directly political. He refutes any allegiance to one fixed view. However what his work does do is to make evident the impact of politics on the individual.

‘I have never tried to make illustrations of apartheid, but the drawings are certainly spawned by and feed off the brutalized society left in its wake. I am interested in a political art, that is to say an art of ambiguity, contradiction, uncompleted gestures and uncertain things. An art (and a politics) in which my optimism is kept in check and my nihilism at bay.’

‘One of the things one normally associates with political art is a sort of clarity of purpose, of thought, of programme, and I think that that clarity of thought and programme and purpose is often absent in the real world and that behind a clarity of rhetoric is often a great confusion of goals, aims, agendas. And the films have been

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8 Williams Kentridge talks to Peter Burchett about his work [http://vimeo.com/13210477](http://vimeo.com/13210477)

saying, or trying to say in a way, that that kind of open-endedness, that is part of the films, does also reflect the kind of open-endedness outside of them."  

Kentridge has spoken of the spectrum of ‘white guilt’ in South Africa. There are those, he says, who refuse to feel guilt, and those who are destroyed by it. Then there are those in between, like him, whose intelligence is shaped by its presence. Kentridge’s animated charcoal drawings draw the viewer into some of the uncomfortable contradictions and tensions experienced at this individual level. In the films Felix in Exile (1994) and History of the Main Complaint (1996) Soho and Felix, like Kentridge, are seen reflecting on their private questions about guilt and responsibility as well as those in the public realm.

Kentridge’s work also draws attention to the particularities of Johannesburg, a city that grew up as a result of its hidden wealth – gold. His animations reference the power of the wealthy white classes in South African society and are set in an over-exploited industrial landscape. Closely resembling Kentridge, two semi-autobiographical characters exemplify the unpalatable tensions of growing up in a privileged class in South Africa. Soho Eckstein, a business-suited capitalist, is seen expanding his mining empire on the outskirts of Johannesburg until his success is destroyed by violent uprisings on the streets. Felix Teitlebaum appears as a kind of alter-ego, the poet and artist, often dreaming of encounters with Soho’s wife.

‘I suppose until I was about 38, there was a National Party in power in South Africa, so the conditions of apartheid were on the one hand naturalised conditions, what I’d always experienced in terms of living in South Africa, but also from a very early age I was aware that it was a very unnatural place to be living in. I’m sure this was helped by the fact of my parents both being lawyers and of both being very much involved in political trials and cases, particularly my father, from the late 1950s onwards. So in that there was I suppose a slight difference from my contemporaries at the whites only, boys only school that I attended, in that there was a sort of awareness of abnormality, which would have been foreign to most of them, where there wouldn’t have been that kind of perspective in what was happening around.’

‘It wasn’t that my pictures were trying to confront the politics of South Africa head on at all, but certainly the element of the world that is constituted by a political context and the violence in its wake, was part of the vocabulary that came into the drawings and later into the films.’

Several of Kentridge’s animations depict scenes of violent brutality and death and he has spoken of the danger that art can exploit other people’s suffering. However, his own experience is that the meticulous process of drawing and re-drawing these scenes creates a relationship with the event that is compassionate, rather than voyeuristic; a ‘sympathy’ that grows with the sheer physical attention that he is required to pay to what is happening in the drawing.

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11 TAPPEINER, MARIA ANNA; WULF, REINHARD William Kentridge, Drawing the Passing 1999 (film)
12 Ibid
13 Ibid
14 William Kentridge: Pain & Sympathy | Art21 “Exclusive”. Kentridge’s discussion of this process can be viewed at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1oK5LMJ3zY
Printmaking influences

‘Over the last 35 years, printmaking has been close to the centre of the work I have done. Prints have never been a side journey or in the margins.’

Kentridge is an expert printmaker. Many of the traditions and techniques that he uses occupy a long history, which has also been shaped by the possibility that printmaking offers of distributing multiple images to a wide audience. Author and playwright Jane Taylor, who has collaborated with Kentridge on a number of occasions, has talked about how he demonstrates an ironic reverence for the long history of printmakers who have gone before him. In an essay on Kentridge, Susan Stewart describes his ‘acute sense of the long tradition of this (the printmaking) form as a means of social change.’

Rembrandt Van Rijn (1606-1669)
Jane Taylor has made the link between Kentridge’s work and a series of prints by Rembrandt called The Three Crosses (1635). Due to the obliterating of the drypoint printing block, Rembrandt’s crucifixion scene that was first radiant and bright gradually gives way to a scene of gloom and darkness. Rembrandt reworked this plate, adding more etched lines between prints and altering the composition with new figures. In printmaking, the term ‘state’ is used to refer to these alterations a printmaker makes to the plate to improve it or change it between presses. Kentridge played with this process of obliteration and change in his series of prints Copper Notes: States 0-11 (2005).

‘Rembrandt’s “states” arose out of meditations upon a scene, and the evolution of an idea. In William’s prints, by contrast, the plate in each case had been so completely reworked as to effectively obliterate the previous image, setting up a remarkable relationship of randomness, as if the principle of chance was its own necessity. Each image became, as it were, the solution, or resolution of the previous image, even though the relationship between them was manifestly coincidental, artificially constructed. State O is an image of dimly visible and largely illegible text, and a triangle. State 2 is a coffee cup, which is trapped inside what has become a second triangle, slightly off-centre of the earlier one, with suggestions of a design around the surface of the cup, rendered as childish doodles. State 3 is a telephone, one in the old bakelite style familiar in William’s work, and State 4 is a megaphone. The numbering of the states itself becomes a visual joke, as William scratches out 1, then 2 and 3 and 4. A skull enters the scene at roughly this point, and the final prints in the series figure a self-portrait which becomes obliterated in a compelling set of prints of accumulating depth and darkness.’

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15 HECKER, JUDITH B; KENTRIDGE, WILLIAM William Kentridge: Trace - Prints from The Museum of Modern Art, Museum of Modern Art 2001
Kentridge has more than once used the symbol of the rhinoceros in his work, making a direct reference to the famously inaccurate rhinoceros woodcut made by Albrecht Dürer in 1515. Dürer’s image was based on a written description and quick sketch by an unknown artist of an Indian rhinoceros that had arrived in Lisbon earlier that year. Dürer never saw the actual rhinoceros as it died in captivity.

Kentridge’s use of the rhinoceros image points to how perceptions of the world can be created and taken as truth. The kind of ‘Chinese whispers’ effect created by the distribution of a printed image like this aligns with some of the other references Kentridge makes to how world events can be reported and perceived.

The rhinoceros has been linked with further symbolism. In her essay for William Kentridge: Flute, Kate McKrickard notes that ‘the rhinoceros was a recognizable symbol of power and kingship in Europe for centuries, most remarkably exemplified
by Clara, a three-ton Indian rhinoceros brought to Europe in 1741, who toured the continent in a horse-driven carriage for seventeen years, becoming a favorite of Frederick the Great and Louis XV.

Some have also suggested that Kentridge’s rhinoceros can be read as a reflection of nineteenth-century Europe’s view of Africa as a wild beast that, like Clara, must be tamed by benevolent rule and made to ‘dance’ on command. In his opera The Magic Flute Kentridge includes archive footage of a rhinoceros being hunted down and killed, thus also highlighting the perverted practices of a supposedly enlightened colonialism.

Jacques Callot (1592 – 1635)
Callot draws on the work of Jacques Callot; a French printmaker who was particularly known for advancing techniques in printmaking. His etchings The Miseries and Misfortunes of War (1633) were an inspiration for other artists such as Goya and Daumier. Like Kentridge, Callot focused on depicting suffering across the board, rather than claiming any particular political alignment.

Callot created a menagerie of satirical characters who would later inspire grotesque derby pottery. Kentridge’s use of archetypal characters has also been linked with the medieval Italian Commedia Dell’arte tradition which Callot depicted following a stay in Florence.

Jacques Callot
Dwarf with plumed hat, playing violin c.1621/25
Etching
6.3x8.4cm
© Trustees of the British Museum

William Hogarth (1697-1764)
Hogarth was an English printmaker, satirist and social critic. Kentridge’s series Industry and Idleness (1986) is a group of eight etchings based on Hogarth’s engraved series of the same name. Hogarth’s series depicts the lives of two characters Tom Idle and Francis Goodchild. In the print Fellow ‘Prentices at their


Loom (1747) the lazy Tom dozes at his work having drunk from a tankard perched on his loom while the industrious Francis studiously concentrates on his task under a godly light that streams through the window.

William Hogarth
The Fellow Prentices at their Loom 1747
Engraving
26x35cm
© Trustees of the British Museum

William Kentridge
Double Shift on Weekends Too
From Industry and Idleness, 1986
Suite of eight etchings
© The artist 2012

Kentridge’s series formed part of a collaborative print project with Deborah Bell and Robert Hodgkins called Hogarth in Johannesburg (1987) and features characters in a poor area of Johannesburg. However, whereas in Hogarth’s images the hard worker prospers and the lazy man falls to ruin, Kentridge reflects the ambiguities of contemporary life by depicting the industrious man undermined by circumstances beyond his control and the idle man prospering due to connection and privilege.

Francisco Goya (1746–1828)
Jacques Callot’s two series depicting The Miseries of War and The Misfortunes of War influenced the work of the Spanish painter and printmaker Francisco Goya. Deeply troubled by the Napoleonic wars, Goya was 62, in bad health and nearly deaf when he began work on his series of prints called The Disasters of War (1810-20)

Kentridge’s series of eight etchings Little Morals (1991) makes a clear reference to Goya’s work in its use of composition and characters. The series takes its title from Theodor Adorno’s book of the same name Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life (1951) in which Adorno depicted the contradictory relationship between the individual’s search for an orderly and compassionate life and the corruption and inhumanity of society at large.
Francisco Goya
*Why?* 1810-14 (pub. 1863)
Plate 32 of *The Disasters of War*
Etching
16x21cm
Private Collection
© The Bridgeman Art Library

William Kentridge
*Negotiations Begin* 1991
From the series *Little Morals*
Etching with sugarlift
23.7x31.8cm
Courtesy David Krut Fine Art
New York and London
© The artist and David Krut Fine Art,
New York and Johannesburg 2012

Honoré Daumier (1808 - 1879)
Kentridge’s work also draws on the work of Daumier; a French printmaker, caricaturist, painter, and sculptor, whose many works provided a commentary on social and political life in France in the 19th century. In his lithograph *Rue Transnonain* (1834) Daumier depicts the barbaric actions of the French National Guard, who shot a family in the working-class district of St Martin repression after a riot on 5 April 1834. The print, which was made for the left-wing publication *La Caricature*, was censored by the government, who destroyed many copies as well as the lithograph stone that was used to make the print.

Honoré Daumier
*Rue Transnonain, le 15 Avril 1834*
Lithograph
29x44.5cm
© Trustees of the British Museum
**Russian Constructivism**

Kentridge’s prints also reflect his interest in political aspects of twentieth-century art, including Constructivism, a short-lived movement of optimism and creativity which involved many Soviet artists and architects during the years 1913 to 1940. The Constructivists talked of ‘shrugging off’ the alignment of art with spirituality and poeticism in favour of a more democratic, functional purpose and style.\(^{22}\) The belief that this form of art could bring about social change was reflected in Shostakovich’s opera *The Nose* (1928), a version of which Kentridge produced in 2010. *The Nose* highlighted the oppressive bureaucracy that was emerging at the time. Just two years after the opera premiered, Stalin brought this period of creativity to an official end, dictating that Soviet artists should only work within the principles of social realist art.

The influence of the Constructivists’ monochromatic prints and posters can be seen clearly in Kentridge’s work, including in his depiction of mechanical motifs and his use of paper cut.

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**German Expressionism**

Kentridge has also acknowledged his interest in the work of the German Expressionist artists of the Weimar period such as Käthe Kollwitz, Otto Dix, Max Liebermann, and others.

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Beckmann and George Grosz, many of whom revitalised an interest in printmaking, elevating its status in art through their dramatic prints and posters, particularly woodcuts. These artists used the stark effects of relief printmaking to draw attention to social issues such as the atrocities of war, social hypocrisy and moral decadence, smug hypocrisy, the plight of the poor and the rise of Nazism.

George Grosz
*Der absolute Monarchist*
*(The absolute monarchist)* 1918
Folio no. 35, from *Ecce Homo.*
©The Estate of George Grosz, Princeton, New Jersey, USA (2012)

William Kentridge
*General* 1993/98
Engraving with watercolour
120x80cm
Published by David Krut Publishing
Courtesy David Krut Projects, New York

**Anti-apartheid poster art**

Finally, it is worth noting Kentridge’s involvement in the printmaking tradition of political poster art. Poster production was an important part of the anti-apartheid campaigns that accelerated in the 1980s both within and outside of South Africa, and Kentridge played his part alongside many unnamed activist artists working in a variety of printmaking mediums including silkscreen and linocut. Kentridge's choice of linocut in later work also makes a connection between this tradition and the German Expressionist appropriation of the ‘primitive’ qualities of African art. The silkscreen prints *Art in a State of Hope* (1988) and *Art in a State of Siege* (1988) mark Kentridge’s transition from designing posters for political protests and theatre productions into fine art printmaking. The brown inked background evokes the cheap paper used for posters (see image p23).

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23 For examples, see [http://doepelganger.com/2012/03/20/apartheid-resistance-posters/](http://doepelganger.com/2012/03/20/apartheid-resistance-posters/)
Printmaking techniques used by Kentridge

The world of printmaking is technically complex and Kentridge deploys a very wide range of printmaking techniques in his work, in many cases combining several printmaking techniques within one piece. His repertoire includes the following processes.

**Intaglio**
Intaglio is an over-arching term that describes a print made from a plate that has been incised in some way. When an inked plate is applied to wet paper and passed through a printing press, the pressure forces the paper to pick up the ink from the incised lines.

**Engraving**
Engraving is an intaglio technique by which a printing plate is created by incising lines or marks directly into a hard surface such as zinc, copper or wood. The surface is coated with printing ink, which is then largely wiped off. Ink remaining in the incised lines is transferred to paper when passed through the printing press.

**Drypoint**
Drypoint is another term used to describe engraving. It is usually used to refer to a very fine, detailed engraving on copper, zinc or Perspex formed with the use of a needle-like point tipped with diamond or carbide. The marks formed have similar qualities to pencil marks, so drypoint has a close relationship to drawing. A characteristic quality of drypoint is that the tool used throws up a burr, so as well as the incised line, the marks have a slightly blurred edge, again similar to pencil marks. Drypoints are usually produced in very limited editions, as the fine lines and burrs are soon worn away in the printmaking process.

**William Kentridge**
*The Critique of Light*
From the series *Thinking Aloud*, 2004
Drypoint
40x50cm
Printed by Randy Hemminghaus and Chris Clarke, Galamander Press
Published by David Krut Fine Art
Courtesy David Krut

In the series of prints *Living Language* (1999) Kentridge experimented with using a gramophone record as the plate onto which he scratched his drypoint lines. His drawn lines combine with the effect of the original grooves in the record.
**Etching**

Etching is a form of intaglio printmaking that uses acid to bite into the surface of a metal plate. A printing plate is made by first coating a metal surface with resin or wax. A design is incised into this coating and the plate then immersed in acid. The acid bites into the unprotected areas of the plate. The remainder of the wax or resin coating is then removed with a solvent before the plate is used.

In a **hard-ground** etching, the wax is hard and is scratched away with a tool, resulting in fine, clean lines.

In a **soft-ground** etching, the wax layer is soft and is removed by placing a piece of paper over it and applying pressure onto the paper which lifts the wax away. This results in softer marks and lines. The sense of bulk and texture in the large figure in the print *Sleeper (Black)* (1997) was created by impressing various materials and objects into the waxy soft ground that had been applied to the etching plate in the initial stage of its preparation. The result can be seen on the surface in the form of cat’s footprints, bicycle tyre tracks and thumbprints.

![William Kentridge Detail from Sleeper (Black), 1997 Etching, aquatint and drypoint 97x193 Courtesy of the artist Photo: John Hodgkiss, © The artist 2012](image)

**Photogravure**

Photogravure is an etching technique that allows a photograph to be transferred onto a printing plate. Most commonly, the printing plate is coated with light-sensitive gelatine. When the plate is exposed to light through a photographic transparency, the areas exposed to light harden, while the rest can be washed away. The plate is then submerged in acid so that the areas not exposed to light are etched by the acid.

The series of prints *Zeno II* (2003) is based on projections made for Kentridge’s production of *Confessions of Zeno*. In a painstaking printmaking process, Kentridge projected a combination of found images from World War II and handmade shadow puppets onto a wall, photographed the projections, then transferred these images onto a photogravure plate. The plate was then also worked with drypoint. The crisp
lines of the drypoint create a sense of foreground behind which the soft images created by the photogravure process almost appear at a distance.

Aquatint
Like etching, aquatint is a technique that involves coating a metal plate with a material that resists acid. However, in this case, the coating is not a solid layer. Typically, making an aquatint involves coating the plate with fine particles of resin. The plate is then heated so the particles melt and adhere. The acid bites between the grainy particles, so that when the plate is printed this results in graded tonal qualities, rather than lines. Aquatint can be added to a plate that has already been engraved or etched.

Sugarlift aquatint
Sugarlift is a variation of aquatint. In this method, the artist paints broad areas of the plate first with a sugar solution (such as condensed milk), before applying the aquatint medium. When the plate is heated, the sugarlift layer lifts off. The plate is then immersed in acid. In such a way, areas that have been treated with the sugar solution are etched to become solid blocks or broad lines against the grainier, tonal background created by the aquatint process. Areas of sugarlift can be seen in the series of prints Little Morals (1991).
**Spitbite aquatint**
Spitbite is another variation of aquatint. Here, instead of the prepared plate being immersed in acid, the acid is painted over the prepared aquatint surface, giving an uneven finish similar to a watercolor wash. Areas of spitbite can clearly be seen in the background of the prints that make up Kentridge’s *West Coast Series* (2010).

![Spitbite aquatint example](image)

*William Kentridge*
*Untitled (Secateurs)* 2010
Sugarlift aquatint, spitbite aquatint, engraving, etching and drypoint

**Lithography**
Lithography is described as a ‘planographic’ printmaking method in that the process takes place on a flat surface, through chemical processes rather than through any kind of etching or incising.

Lithography relies on the repulsion of water and oil. In its traditional form, greasy marks were applied to a treated limestone slab using crayons or liquids that are drawn or painted onto the surface. Now, more typically, the surface is aluminium or polyester. When the slab is wetted, oil based ink adheres to the greasy areas and is repelled from the untreated areas. The lithograph process allows a very direct relationship between the initial drawing and the resulting print. Unlike with a relief print, in a lithograph there is no negative and positive version. The greasy painted or drawn areas become the dark areas of the print.

**Photolithography**
In photolithography, the image is applied to the printing surface by photographic exposure. *Learning the Flute (Reverse)* (2004) is one of a pair of prints made in this way, from photographs of drawings made by Kentridge while he was working on a production of Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute*. Some plates were exposed from a positive photographic image and some from a negative. Half of the edition was printed on 110 pages of *a Chambers Encyclopaedia*, while the rest were printed on white paper cut to the same size.

**Relief printmaking**
A relief print is made from a block in which lines are cut away to leave areas standing proud. These areas are coated with ink and a print is taken from the block. Relief prints are the reverse of intaglio prints. In an intaglio prints it is the cut lines...
that hold the ink, whereas in a relief print the cut away areas remain blank. Unlike with intaglio printmaking, the pressure of a printing press is not essential, as the block can be simply pressed onto a surface.

**Linocut**

Linocut is a form of relief printmaking in which cuts are made into a lino surface, often mounted on a wooden block. Cuts are made using a variety of chisel like tools, ranging from those with a tiny ‘v’ shaped edge to create a fine line, to those with a large scoop shaped edge for removing larger areas.

Due to the ready availability of the materials and equipment needed for linocut, black and white linocut has a long history in South Africa. The life-sized figures of *Telephone Lady* (2000) and *Walking Man* (2000) were printed on the largest press in South Africa, and produced for an exhibition promoting the tradition of linocut printing in the country. At the time, Kentridge was also experimenting with presenting works at a large scale in theatre and animation.

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**William Kentridge**

*Telephone Lady*, 2000
Linocut
216x120cm

Courtesy David Krut Fine Art New York and London
© The artist and David Krut Fine Art, New York and Johannesburg 2012

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**Chine collé**

Chine collé involves different papers being introduced into the printmaking process. Typically, torn or cut paper is pasted and then placed on the inked plate, paste side up. The printing paper is placed on top. When passed through the printing press, the pressure ensures that the additional pieces of paper are firmly glued to the printing paper. This method enables colour, tone and texture to be incorporated under the printed image.

Kentridge used the chine collé method for the suite of prints *Sleeping on Glass* (1999). The double-page spreads were taken from found books, making each edition unique.

**Monotype**

Monotype, or monoprint, is a very direct form of printmaking in which an image is drawn or painted onto a smooth surface such as Perspex or glass, and paper is placed directly onto the image to make a print. Alternatively, the surface can be fully
inked and a drawing made by scraping away the ink or drawing a line into it. Another form of monotype involves placing a piece of paper carefully onto a surface that has been lightly inked, and drawing onto the back of the paper, so as to lift the ink from the surface underneath. Whatever the exact method, monotype takes its name from the fact that unlike with other printing methods, only one unique image can be created at a time.

**Silkscreen**

Silkscreen is the only printmaking method in which the image doesn’t end up reversed. In this respect, it is closer to stencilling than printmaking. A design is created by applying an impermeable substance to areas of a fine mesh stretched across a frame. The frame is placed on the surface to be printed and ink dragged across the frame with a squeegee. Ink passes through the uncoated areas of the mesh to create a crisp image with solid inked areas and clean edges.

William Kentridge  
*Art in a State of Siege* 1988  
Silkscreen  
160x100cm  
Printed by Malcolm Christian, The Caversham Press  
Courtesy the artist
Work in other media

Kentridge’s work is truly interdisciplinary, in that without concern for convention or status he playfully weaves and splices together materials, techniques and opportunities from across the visual and performing arts.

Animated drawings

Kentridge is particularly known for his animated films made from charcoal drawings. To create them, paper is fixed to the wall of the studio on which he makes a drawing which he photographs. In between each shoot he smudges, erases and redraws the work so that a narrative emerges as the drawing changes. Charcoal is the ideal medium because of its strong tonal range, which works well when photographed. It is also easy to draw with and erase, making it quick to work with.

Kentridge talks about the creativity of this process, as it allows a story to emerge as the drawing begins, rather than from a pre-conceived plan. Typically, he will begin with an initial scene, after which ideas start to flow from the physical act of making and remaking the drawings. He describes how it’s in the walk between the camera and drawing that successive ideas emerge for how the animation will develop. The process is slow and painstaking. A single film can take between 4-6 months to shoot, with Kentridge shooting on average just 40-50 seconds of animation per week.

Collage

Work with cut or torn paper is a recurring aspect of Kentridge’s work. Portage (2000), conceived as an accordion fold-out in an artist’s book, was made by tearing figures out of black paper and sticking them down on the unbound pages of Le Nouveau Larousse Illustré encyclopaedia. Multiple editions were then created by cutting metal templates of the figures, from which further paper versions were torn and glued down. A total of 6,000 torn black fragments and three volumes of Larousse were used to make an edition of 33.

As well as being combined with printmaking using this chine collé technique, paper cut outs are also animated and incorporated into performances. In the video/lecture/performance I am Not Me, the Horse is not Mine (2008) Kentridge talks...
about this constant search for meaning. As he talks we see behind him a collection of black shapes forming and un-forming the shape of a horse.

‘So you have a series of torn shapes for example, and how much is it about a generosity of viewing and how much is it about an inability of ourselves to stop seeing, a shape, a face, a form, a horse..... and with this pressure for meaning, comes a latching onto it as a fragmentary form, even to ideas as they start to disappear..... and even as the horse starts to get more and more fragmentary and is reduced to a single line, we hang onto that stick, as a hand to a saving bannister.’

Sculptures
Kentridge has extended his work with paper from two dimensions into three. Some of these sculptures, made from black paper and held together crudely with wires and adhesive, appear to be abstract, deprived of any intelligible shape. Making meaning becomes the task of the viewer as he/she moves around the piece. At a certain angle, order and meaning take shape out of seeming chaos. Other sculptures move at the turn of a handle until a meaningful form appears from the fragments while some use light and shadow.

William Kentridge
With construction for Return, 2008
Courtesy the artist’s studio 2012

Such optical illusions are known as anamorphs; the most famous of these being the strange form that appears in the foreground of Hans Holbein’s painting The Ambassadors (1533) which, when seen from side on, takes the form of a skull.

Anamorphic drawings
Anamorphs feature in other examples of Kentridge’s work. In the piece What will Come (Has Already Come) (2007), which explores the Italian/Ethiopian war of the 1930s, a cylindrical mirror reflects an extraordinary animated drawing. To make this piece, Kentridge placed a cylindrical mirror in the centre of a circular charcoal drawing, which he then progressively erased and redrew, taking photos as he did so, as with his other charcoal animations. He avoided needing the complex mathematical formulas that are usually used to create anamorphs by simply looking in the mirror while he drew instead of looking at the paper on which he was drawing. What is seen in the mirror becomes a perceptible reality, while the flat drawing looks distorted and indecipherable.

24 Kentridge’s eight channel video I am Not Me, the Horse is not Mine (2008) will be shown at The Tanks, Tate Modern from 11 November 2012 – 20 January 2013
William Kentridge

*What Will Come (has already come)*, 2007
Steel table, cylindrical steel mirror
and 35mm, transferred to video
8 mins 40 secs
Courtesy the artist's studio 2012

**Objects / installations**

Kentridge has created other three-dimensional objects and installations. The mechanical theatre piece, *Black Box / Chambre Noire* (2005) is an intricately constructed raised proscenium stage, 12 feet high, with drawings and projections, including live-action and animated films, and mechanised puppets that roll in and out of the wings. The piece recounts the 1904 German suppression of the Herero uprising in present-day Namibia which involved widespread genocide, rape and starvation. The title establishes a link both with the black box camera in photography and the flight data recorder that captures information in the event of a plane crash.

William Kentridge

*Black Box / Chambre Noire*, 2005
Model theatre with drawings, mechanical puppets
and 35mm animated films transferred to video
Courtesy the artist's studio 2012

**Tapestries**

In 2001, Kentridge began making a series of tapestries in collaboration with the Stephens Tapestry Studio in Johannesburg. His designs replicate images that combine his cut paper, drawings and silhouettes. As in the projections used in his performance pieces, tapestries serve as another way of increasing the scale of smaller art works. Historically, they also have cultural significance as art form associated both with denoting wealth and with alleviating the harsh conditions of nomadic existence.

To make them, art works are photographed and printed on a much larger scale. These are then placed behind the loom to serve as a guide as the tapestry is woven. Forging another link with Kentridge's interest in projection, the finished work is
essentially a grid of dots of colour that form a pattern; not unlike the pixellation that occurs when an image is projected larger than the original. 25

Performances
Kentridge’s early interest in theatre has continued to play a major part in his work. He has collaborated regularly over the years with the Handspring Puppet Company. In these productions, life-like, near life-sized puppets of human figures are both operated by, and interact with, the actors who operate them. Projected animations frequently add insight into what is happening between actors and puppets. For example, in Ubu and the Truth Commission (1997) (written by Jane Taylor) a white doctor is looking into a black patient’s ear. The animation in the background shows each ear up close, while the music switches between Western classical music in the doctor’s ear and Black African music in the patient’s.

Similarly in his productions of The Magic Flute (2005) and The Nose (2010) large scale projections of animated drawings, collages and real footage play behind and over the actors and performers on stage.

Kentridge describes how from a very young age, he had always wanted to conduct an orchestra or direct an opera, and describes the links with drawing.

‘There’s also a way that as soon as one works with projection, whatever your scale of drawing, even if your initial image is very small, there’s a possibility of very large expansion. It’s not like the extraordinary skill and activity you need to do a huge painting or even a huge drawing. There’s a way in which you can fill whatever size wall you like, it just depends on how bright your projector is. So in that sense this shift of scale is not such a dramatic thing as it looks on stage.’ 26


Lectures
In a further blurring of the boundaries between disciplines, Kentridge’s lectures are as much art works and performances as they are talks. Live talks are often illustrated with animated elements projected behind him as he speaks. Examples are the Norton Lectures, which he gave at Harvard University in 2012.

In other pieces, Kentridge can be seen in dialogue with himself, sometimes combined with drawing and animation. In a witty video interview for the New York Studio School, one William Kentridge interviews the other, exploring the idea of how differing agendas and perspectives play out in communication.27

27 This interview can be seen at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9F1hMgJLaVY
Approaches and themes in Kentridge’s work

Across Kentridge’s multiplicity of techniques and art forms, a number of themes and motifs appear with regularity.

A democratic way of working
Kentridge’s ways of working reject notions of preciousness and elitism. Early on, he refused to be drawn into the perfectionism of oil painting. He embraced instead the idea of working with rough charcoal drawings that were often, particularly at art school, seen merely as humble precursors to the more lofty pursuit of working with paint on canvas. He talks openly about his inability to see an image in his mind and draw it, and his envy of those who can. If he draws a person, he needs to rely on a model to be able to work out the subtleties of posture and expression.28 His disinterest in individualism and the rarefication of the artist is also reflected in his enthusiasm for working with collaborators, including other printmakers, print workshops, musicians, script-writers, puppeteers and weavers.

Art as thinking process
The series of prints Thinking Aloud (2004) reflects Kentridge’s sense that ideas form in the making of, rather than before, the creation of a work of art. These prints were made during an interview and are rather like notes or doodles in which ideas are forming. This approach is core to Kentridge’s animated drawings, in which ideas form through the evolution of the drawing process, rather than being planned out beforehand. Kentridge’s art is an extended thinking process; a fluid, intelligent and playful reflection on the world, a constant capturing of experience, of making connections. In his printmaking process this journeying occurs from the initial creation of the plate, to what arises in the printing press, to where this may lead next. In the animation process this journeying occurs from frame to frame, while over his lifetime we see it evolving from art work to art work.

The passage of time and traces of history
The evolution of ideas that Kentridge makes visible in his work also reflects his interest in the legacy of historical events. In talking about his animated drawings, Kentridge talks about history remaining visible in the slight traces that remain of previous drawings, now obliterated by his eraser. There is always a mark of what was before. This particularly reflects the painful imprint of apartheid on South Africa after its demise.

The personal and the social
Kentridge’s work frequently explores the relationship between the internal desires and intentions of the individual and the structures and demands placed on us by the external world. This can be seen in the series of prints Summer Graffiti (2002) in which Kentridge’s erotic drawings contrast naughtily with the school blackboard and exercise book in the background. Looking for a suitable textbook on which to print a fundraising work for his old school, Kentridge describes coming across a teacher’s manual in a second-hand bookshop called 'Errors in School'. His misreading of this as 'Eros in School' prompted this series.

28 TAPPEINER, MARIA ANNA; WULF, REINHARD William Kentridge, Drawing the Passing 1999 (film)
Kentridge has spoken of his interest in how subjective experience dictates the importance of events. A toothache can loom large in our consciousness and obliterate some greater atrocity taking place outside of our own personal world.29 This is reflected in Kentridge’s interest in Italo Svevo’s book Confessions of Zeno (1923) in which the protagonist Zeno records his inner world of desires, fantasies and struggles set against the realities of war and industrialisation. The series of etchings Zeno at 4am (2001), which depicts characters and costumes for Kentridge’s theatre production based on the book, reflects these tensions.

**The divided self**

Kentridge’s work frequently explores our internal splits and conflicts, notably through the two characters depicted in his charcoal animations. Overweight, over-fed, cigar-smoking Soho Eckstein is greedy and self-seeking. Felix Teitlebaum, Soho’s nemesis, is usually depicted naked, as the poetic lover. Kentridge draws both characters using a mirror and has talked about how there are autobiographical dimensions to both.

‘Initially I would always conceive Soho as an other, as an alien, very much based on images of rapacious industrialists from Russian and early Futurist propaganda drawings, of George Grosz and German Expressionism. But after a few films I understood that in many ways he looked like my paternal grandfather, and in fact years ago I had made some drawings of my grandfather in his suit on the beach that looked just like Soho. This made me understand that maybe he was not as far from me as I had anticipated. Over the next few films, up to Weighing… and Wanting, I understood Soho and Felix much more as two different sides of one character rather than two fundamentally different characters.’30

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29 TAPPEINER, MARIA ANNA; WULF, REINHARD William Kentridge, Drawing the Passing 1999 (film)

30 William Kentridge interviewed by Lilian Tone about Stereoscope in 1999
http://artarchives.net/artarchives/liliantone/tonekentridge.html
A similar split occurs in Kentridge’s exploration of the character of Ubu Roi, as seen in his series of etchings *Ubu Tells the Truth* (1996-97), made to coincide with the centenary of Alfred Jarry’s absurdist play, *Ubu Roi* (1896). The line drawings of Ubu are taken directly from Alfred Jarry’s illustrations of the character from his play, with his large form, spiral belly and slanted eyes. The ‘Act’ and ‘Scene’ numbers in this series are fictitious. The white chalk-like drawings are engraved over textured drawings made using photographs of the artist himself.
Kentridge used two different printing plates to superimpose the taunting cartoon-like image of Ubu over a self-portrait figure who seems oppressed by Ubu’s bulkiness. The two can be read as reflecting personal tensions between morality and desire.

The process of perception
Kentridge’s work frequently makes evident the process of perception, making us aware of the physical act by which we see the world as one, yet through two eyes. His charcoal animation Stereoscope (1998-9) plays with the idea of this optical device, which usually overlays two slightly different images to create a three-dimensional whole. In this film, Kentridge starts with a single image. At points throughout the film we see two slightly different variations of one image. These split images allude to the cost of attempting to hold multiple perspectives on the world.

His interest in perception is again evident in the series ‘Sleeping on Glass’ (1999) in which he prints onto the double page spread of a book in order to split images into two and thus play with different readings.

William Kentridge
Purple
From the series Sleeping on Glass, 1999
Etching with soft ground, aquatint and coloured pencil crayon
21.5x28cm
Courtesy David Krut Fine Art New York and London
© The artist and David Krut Fine Art, New York and Johannesburg 2012

As explored in the previous section, Kentridge’s interest in our perceptual capacities is also seen in his use of collage and paper cut. As a further dimension of his interest in the trickery of perception, Kentridge has also explored the themes of magic and illusion. In the animated film Taking a Line for a Walk (2007) we see Kentridge playing with our ability to enjoy deception even when we fully understand it. He describes ‘the pleasure of knowing that understanding something doesn’t dismantle it’.

The absurd
Many of Kentridge’s works make reference to the idea of ‘the absurd’. Explored through literature, theatre and art, absurdism was a philosophical movement linked to surrealism and existentialism, based on the idea that beneath the logic and structure by which we attempt to live our lives, there is meaninglessness to human existence. As well as exploring the idea that tragedy and disaster can befall us all,
absurdism also makes evident the ridiculousness of the habits and structures by which we exist. Kentridge’s explorations also extend to the absurdity of apartheid; a system that had become brutally lost in its own ridiculous logic.

Absurdism also plays with coincidence, chance and possibility. An aspect of this is the process by which meanings are created when random objects are put together. While readings of Kentridge’s work often imbue his choice of objects with personal and political intent, he has refuted the notion of deliberate intent, suggesting instead that objects suggest themselves to him, onto which he and his audience project their own meanings. This is a possibility for audiences faced with Kentridge’s two large prints Telephone Lady (2000) and Walking Man (2000) in which a woman’s head is supplanted by a telephone and a man’s by a tree.

**Mechanical devices**

Optical devices and measuring equipment such as cameras, telescopes and compasses form common motifs in Kentridge’s work. One reading of his interest in these devices is that they offer different ways by which authoritative perceptions of the world have been constructed. Emanating from the European Enlightenment, many of these instruments promised an objective, scientific explanation of the world. However, a darker reading of these devices is also possible, in which they are used as devices of control and distortion. They perhaps make reference to the wave of ‘scientific racism’ that took hold in the 18th and 19th centuries, in which scientific measures such as craniometrics (measurements of brain size and shape) were used to argue that people of black African descent had smaller brains and were less intelligent and less advanced in evolutionary terms. Later, in the early 20th century, photographs of African ‘natives’ became fashionable and were widely circulated as postcards as well as in books and magazines. These photographs depicted tribal people as objects of curiosity, as the primitive ‘other’.

In his animated film *Felix in Exile* (1994) Kentridge includes images of a theodolite and a sextant. The theodolite fixes a position, while the sextant is used for mapping out a terrain. These are the tools of surveying, associated with gold mining and land ownership, making references to the exploitation of South Africa’s underground wealth.

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32 For further exploration of these ideas, see JAY, MARTIN *Force Fields: Exercises in Cultural Criticism*, Routledge 1993
A shredder and a photocopier appear in the performance *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1997). Both offer ways of dealing with documentary evidence; the shredder used by those seeking to obliterate evidence of the past and the photocopier used by those committed to keeping it on record.

Other common mechanical motifs include electricity pylons, telephones, megaphones and typewriters. All of these are different forms of power, documentation and communication; emblems of the systems by which the modern world operates. In the series of prints *Zeno at 4am* (2001) we see what could reference a futuristic excitement about the relationship between humans and machines, or a concern with the inhumanity of over-mechanisation. This recurs in *West Coast Series* (2010), a series of prints designed for wine labels.

Kentridge’s interest in anthropomorphism (our tendency to see the human form in objects) plays out in these combinations. This is also seen in the print *Self Portrait as a Coffee Pot* (2012) and the series *Universal Archive (12 Coffee Pots)* (2012).

**Cat**

The image of a black cat makes an appearance in several of Kentridge’s films, in the print *Scribble Cat* (2010), as well as curled on a gramophone record in the print *Living Language (Cat)* 1999. In the animated film *Stereoscope* (1998-9) the cat reappears in several scenes and serves as a way of transporting the viewer between events. Indeed, the cat also makes links between different works of art.

‘The cat goes through a whole season of transformations. It is sort of saying “this is the same world” — any character, or event, or situation, you see in an earlier film automatically gets right of entry into the current film.’

Kentridge has rejected the idea that his cat holds any particular symbolism, saying ‘I never start with a meaning, so cannot tell you what the cat symbolises, if anything - I simply knew that I needed a cat at that moment of the film.’

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**William Kentridge**

*Scribble Cat*, 2010
Sugarlift aquatint, spitbite aquatint, drypoint and hand painting
102x179.8cm

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33 William Kentridge interviewed by Lilian Tone about *Stereoscope* in 1999
http://artarchives.net/artarchives/liliantone/tonekentridge.html

34 Interview with William Kentridge during studio visit by One People Voice orchestra (2001) www.onespeople.com
Nonetheless Kentridge has made reference to his interest in the cat that appears in Mayakovsky’s play *A Tragedy* (1913). The play makes reference to patting a cat in order to harbour electricity for the trams. A line in the play goes ‘pat the cat, the big black cat!’ and Kentridge has talked about how this influenced him to put a cat in his animated film *Stereoscope* (1998-9). It is possible that this also informed the style of Kentridge’s cats, which always seem to appear as if they are ‘electrified’.

As a precursor to his *Universal Archive* prints, Kentridge experimented with collage – painting numerous black cats and then layering the various versions on top of each other. Each piece of paper was meticulously cut at a precise angle rather than torn (Kentridge’s usual method) and marked with red circles. When pinned together, the pieces achieve the ‘perfect’ arch of the cat’s back, head, tail and feet. Subtle nuances of a cat’s postures are captured in the different combinations of cut pieces.

**Water**

Water, often rendered in intense blue, stands out in the dryness of Kentridge’s charcoal drawings. Water flows from showerheads, taps, bowls and pools. It leaks out of the character Soho in the film *Felix in Exile* (1994), as something gentler, more fluid and emotional than might be expected from this hard-headed capitalist. Kentridge talks about using water as a symbol of hope, of redemption, a kind of ‘wishful thinking’ from which growth is possible.

**Lines**

Kentridge frequently uses lines to make visible the connections between people, objects and events, as for example the blue lines used in the animated film *Stereoscope* (1999).

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35 TAPPEINER, MARIA ANNA; WULF, REINHARD *William Kentridge, Drawing the Passing* 1999 (film)
'With the blue lines, I think on the one hand they’re trying to make something directly visible that is normally invisible. A lot of the drawing, the activity of being a visual artist, is trying somehow to bridge the gap between what we can see and what we know, so that in the same way as the films record the passage of time… one of the things you can do in this kind of animation, that can be very easy or can become enormously complicated or stylistically odd, is to draw very literally links and connections, like a child’s very schematic drawing or a diagram almost.'

Lines also appear in the context of diagrams and annotations. They can be seen in the series of etchings Thinking Aloud (2004) in which lines denote the journey of connections from thought to thought in the development of ideas.

**The circle**
The circle is used by Kentridge in a number of works and the form evokes a sense of repetition and of endlessness.

Inspired by Goya’s frescoes in Real Ermita de San Antonio de la Florida, Madrid, the prints in Kentridge’s Atlas Procession series (2000) depict endless circular processions. Originally created from torn pieces of black paper, the etchings use forms derived from these torn shapes. The challenge of painting life-like representations within a circle (for Goya this was a domed ceiling) also connects with Kentridge’s anamorphic projections onto curved surfaces.

Kentridge also used the circular form in his series of prints Living Language (1999) in which he makes prints using drypoint on gramophone records.

**The procession**
The motif of the procession is a recurring theme, and can be seen in Kentridge’s prints Atlas Procession II (2000), Portage (2000) and later, in Eight Figures (2010).

In the image of the procession we see reference to many of the global themes that Kentridge is concerned with. The procession is associated with events ranging from carnival and religious ceremony, to the marches of the militant and the chain-ganged work-force, to the trudge of refugees or those made homeless by ethnic cleansing or...
disaster. The diversity of this theme is also explored in Kentridge’s paper cut animation *Shadow Procession* (2001).

**The porter**

Sometimes forming part of a procession and sometimes standing alone, the image of a figure carrying a burden or pulling a weight recurs frequently in Kentridge’s work. We may read this figure as alluding perhaps to the history of slavery and segregation; to those who carry and those who are carried for. The figure can also be linked to the forced re-housings of black citizens under South Africa’s homelands programme; the individual forced to pack up their life on their back and carry it somewhere new. Finally, the motif of the porter has also been read as referencing the burden of guilt forged by South Africa’s history, a guilt that, as a White South African, Kentridge is all too familiar with.
Websites

http://www.moma.org/explore/multimedia/videos/95
Five short video pieces in which the artist talks about his work.

http://www.davidkrutpublishing.com/kent_prints1.htm
A detailed description of the history of Kentridge’s involvement in printmaking.

http://mahindrahumanities.fas.harvard.edu/content/norton-lectures
Kentridge delivered a series of six lectures at Harvard University in March and April 2012. All six lectures can be viewed here.

A number of useful essays on Kentridge’s work can be found at www.art21.org including this one on Kentridge’s prints.

Books / papers


List of works in the exhibition

Measurements are given in centimetres, height x width.

**Art in a State of Hope, 1988**
Silkscreen on Vélin d'Arches Crème 300 gsm and brown paper
160 x 100
Edition of 13
Printed by Malcolm Christian, The Caversham Press
Published by the artist
Private Collection

**Art in a State of Siege, 1988**
Silkscreen on Vélin d'Arches Crème 300 gsm and brown paper
160 x 100
Edition of 13
Printed by Malcolm Christian, The Caversham Press
Published by the artist
Private Collection

**Little Morals, 1991**
Series of eight etchings with sugarlift, each from one zinc plate, on Velin d'Arches Blanc paper
Each 23.7 x 31.8 (image size); 32.5 x 44.5 (paper size)
Edition of 45
Printed by Malcolm Christian, The Caversham Press
Published by the artist
Courtesy the artist

**Ubu Tells the Truth, 1996-97**
Suite of eight etchings with soft ground, aquatint and drypoint, each from one zinc plate and an engraved polycarbon sheet, on Fabriano Rosapina Bianco 220gsm paper
Each 25 x 30 (image); 36 x 50 (paper)
Edition of 45
Courtesy David Krut

**Sleeper (Black), 1997**
Etching, aquatint and drypoint, from two copper plates, on Velin d'Arches Blanc 300gsm paper
97 x 193
Edition of 50, only 20 of numbered edition completed
Printed by Jack Sheriff and Andrew Smith, 107 Workshop
Published by David Krut Fine Art
Courtesy David Krut

**Living Language (Cat), 1999**
Drypoint from one vinyl gramophone record, on Fabriano Rosapina Avorio 220gsm paper
**Living Language (Panic Picnic), 1999**
Drypoint from one vinyl gramophone record, on Fabriano Rosapina Avorio 220gsm paper
Image diameter: 24.7; paper: 49.8 x 34.8
Edition of 16
Printed by Malcolm Christian, The Caversham Press
Published by the artist and The Caversham Press
Courtesy the artist

**Living Language (Trees), 1999**
Drypoint from one vinyl gramophone record, on Fabriano Rosapina Avorio 220gsm paper
Image diameter: 24.7; paper: 55 x 36.5
Edition of 16
Printed by Malcolm Christian, The Caversham Press
Published by the artist and The Caversham Press
Courtesy the artist

**Sleeping on Glass, 1999**
Suite of six etchings with soft ground, aquatint and coloured pencil crayon, each from one copper plate, on spreads from found books, on Fabriano Rosapina Bianco 220gsm paper
Each 35 x 50 (paper)
Each (image): Adaptability 20.2 x 32; Compliance 24.5; Silence 21.5 x 28; Staying 18.5 x 24.5; Home Panic 22 x 28.5; Picnic Safer 22 x 28.5; Tropics 22 x 28.5; This is how the Tree Breaks: Terminal 22 x 28.5; Hurt Terminal 22 x 28.5; Longing 22 x 28.5
Edition of 60
Courtesy David Krut

**Atlas Procession I, 2000**
Etching, aquatint and drypoint, from one copper plate, and letterpress from a mylar sheet with further hand-painting by the artist, on Velin d'Arches Blanc 300gsm paper
158 x 108
Edition of 40
Printed by Jack Shirreff and Andrew Smith, 107 Workshop
Published by David Krut Fine Art
Courtesy David Krut

**Atlas Procession II, 2000**
Etching, aquatint and drypoint, from one copper plate, and letterpress from a mylar sheet with further hand-painting by the artist, on Velin d'Arches Blanc 300gsm paper
158 x 108
Edition of 30
Portage, 2000
Collage of figures from black Canson paper on multiple spreads from *Le Nouveau Larousse Illustré Encyclopaedia* (c. 1906), on Velin d'Arches Creme paper, folded as a leperello
Image: 27.5 x 423; Portfolio, laid flat: 29 x 25.5 x 2
Edition of 33
Printed by Mark Attwood, Paul Emmanuel and Joseph Legate, The Artists’ Press
Published by the artist
Courtesy David Krut

Telephone Lady, 2000
Linocut on rice paper and canvas
216 x 120
Edition of 25
Printed by Osiah Masekoameng and Jackie Motswani, Artist Proof Studio
Published by David Krut Fine Art
Courtesy David Krut

Walking Man, 2000
Linocut on rice paper and canvas
248 x 101.5
Edition of 25
Printed by Osiah Masekoameng and Jackie Motswani, Artist Proof Studio
Published by David Krut Fine Art
Courtesy David Krut

Zeno at 4am, 2001
Nine etchings on one sheet
Etching with sugarlift aquatint, from nine copper plates, on one sheet of Hahnemühle paper
98.2 x 81.8
Edition of 12
Printed by Maurice Payne, New York
Published by David Krut Fine Art
Courtesy David Krut

Summer Graffiti, 2002
Suite of eight lithographs printed in five colours, on eight sheets of Velin d'Arches Creme 250gsm paper, the paper die-cut with round corners before printing
Each 18.2 x 23.1
Edition of 45
Printed by Mark Attwood and Joseph Legate, The Artists’ Press
Published by the artist
Courtesy the artist
Zeno II, 2003
Suite of seven photogravures with drypoint from two copper plates, on Hahnemühle Copperplate Warm White paper
Each 35.5 x 50.5 (image); 50.5 x 65.6 (paper)
Edition of 30
Printed by Randy Hemminghaus and Chris Clarke, Galamander Press
Published by David Krut Fine Art
Courtesy Randy Hemminghaus

Learning the Flute (Reverse), 2004
Photolithograph on white Arches Johannot 240gsm paper
281.5 x 356.6
Edition of 18
Printed by Mark Attwood and Joseph Legate, The Artists’ Press
Published by the Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg
Courtesy the artist

Thinking Aloud, 2004
Suite of three drypoints, each from one copper plate, on Hahnemühle Warm White paper
Each 40 x 50 (image); 54 x 64 (paper)
Edition of 20
Printed by Randy Hemminghaus and Chris Clarke, Galamander Press
Published by David Krut Fine Art
Courtesy David Krut

Nose, 2007-2009
Suite of thirty etchings
Sugarlift aquatint, drypoint and engraving (1-6, 15, 17, 20, 22, 27, 28); Sugarlift aquatint, hardground etching and engraving (7); Sugarlift aquatint and engraving (8, 9, 14); Sugarlift aquatint, hardground etching, drypoint and engraving (10, 16, 18, 19, 21, 23-26, 29, 30). All on Somerset Velvet Soft White 300gsm paper
Each 35 x 40 (paper, landscape), except 5, 6, 14-22, 24, 25, 27 and 28 (portrait)
Each an Edition of 50
Printed by Jillian Ross assisted by Lungi Kongisa and Niall Bingham at David Krut Print Workshop (DKW), Johannesburg
Published by David Krut Fine Art
Courtesy David Krut

Eight Figures, 2010
Linocut (relief print) with hand painting in Indian ink, on Hahnemühle White 350gsm paper
Image: 85 x 180; paper: 105 x 210
Edition of 40
Printed and published by Motsamai Thabane, The Artists Proof Studio
Courtesy the artist

Scribble Cat, 2010
Sugarlift aquatint, spitbite aquatint, drypoint and hand-painting, on six sheets of Hahnemühle Natural White 300gsm paper
West Coast series, 2010

*Untitled (Skurfberg)*, 2010, Sugarlift aquatint and hand-painting, printed on Tosa Washi paper, *chine collé* attached to Hahnemühle Natural White 300gsm paper

*Untitled (Black Chair)*, 2010, Sugarlift aquatint, spitbite, drypoint on Hahnemühle Natural White 300gsm paper

*Untitled (Secateurs)*, 2010, Sugarlift aquatint, spitbite aquatint, engraving, etching and drypoint, on Hahnemühle Natural White 300gsm paper

*Untitled (Scarecrow)*, 2010, Sugarlift aquatint with hand-painting, printed on Tosa Washi paper, *chine collé* attached to Hahnemühle Natural White 300gsm paper

*Untitled (Olifantsrivier)*, 2010, Sugarlift aquatint, spitbite aquatint, engraving, etching and drypoint, on Hahnemühle Natural White 300gsm paper

Each 29.8 x 29.6 (image); 46 x 46 (paper)

Edition of 30

Printed by Jillian Ross assisted by Lungi Kongisa at David Krut Print Workshop (DKW), Johannesburg

Published by David Krut Fine Art

Courtesy David Krut

Monitor, 2012

Lithography and collage on various types of paper

70.5 x 86.5

Edition of 35

Printing and assembled by Mark Attwood, Leshoka Legate, Jacky Tsila, The Artists’ Press

Published by the Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg

Courtesy the artist

The Full Stop, 2012

Lithography and collage on various types of paper

70.5 x 86.5

Edition of 35

Printing and assembled by Mark Attwood, Leshoka Legate, Jacky Tsila, The Artists’ Press

Published by the Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg

Courtesy the artist

A Universal Archive, 2012

Lithography and collage on various types of paper

70.5 x 86.5

Edition of 35

Printing and assembled by Mark Attwood, Leshoka Legate, Jacky Tsila, The Artists’ Press

Published by the Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg
Unremember, 2012
Lithography and collage on various types of paper
70.5 x 86.5
Edition of 35
Printing and assembled by Mark Attwood, Leshoka Legate, Jacky Tsila, The Artists’ Press
Published by the Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg
Courtesy the artist

Self Portrait as a Coffee Pot, 2012
Lithography & collage on various types of paper
98.5 x 80
Edition of 35
Printing and assembled by Mark Attwood, Leshoka Legate, Jacky Tsila, The Artists’ Press
Published by the Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg
Courtesy the artist

Universal Archive (12 Coffee Pots), 2012
Linocut printed on non-archival pages from Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, mounted on Velin Arches Cover White 400gsm paper
Image: approx. 92.5 x 93.3; paper: 110.5 x 109
Edition of 30
Printed, editioned and assembled by Jillian Ross and Mlungisi Kongisa assisted by Talya Lubinsky, David Krut Print Workshop (DKW)
Published by David Krut Fine Art
Courtesy David Krut

Universal Archive Cat Assemblage A, B, C and D, 2012
Assembled progressions from four linocuts, printed on non-archival pages from Encyclopedia Britannica, shaped and mounted onto Arches Cover White 400gsm paper (each variation marked with A, B, C or D in red crayon).
Image dimensions variable; paper: 43 x 66.5
Edition of 50: A; 1/50 – 10/50, B; 11/50 – 20/50, C; 21/50 – 30/50, D; 31/50 – 50/50
Printed, editioned and assembled by Jillian Ross and Mlungisi Kongisa, David Krut Print Workshop (DKW); assisted by Lisa Cloete from the artists’ studio.
Published by David Krut Fine Art
Courtesy David Krut