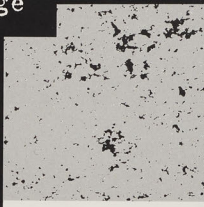


William Kentridge

WEIGHING...

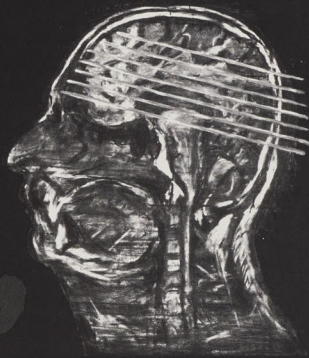
and WANTING

MIT List Visual Arts Center
Cambridge, Massachusetts
January 15- March 28, 1999



Ours is an era of singular attention to war crimes,
reparation, and global "peacekeeping." We are, it
seems, increasingly aware of the obligation to hear
testimony, while we are yet defining ways of
acting upon what we have heard.

—William Kentridge in William Kentridge (CD-ROM, 1997)



Untitled from WEIGHING...and WANTING, 1997
(component of installation with
video flanked by two drawings)
Drawing of charcoal, pastel, and gouache on paper
48 x 63 inches

WEIGHING...

Jennifer Riddell, Assistant Curator
MIT List Visual Arts Center



Both images from
WEIGHING...and WANTING, 1997
Film transferred to laser
disk and projected
Dimensions variable

and WANTING

William Kentridge was born in Johannesburg, South Africa in 1955, where he continues to live and work. The landscape of South Africa, the apartheid era, and the conditions in present-day South Africa — the euphoria following Nelson Mandela's release from his 27 year imprisonment, the ascendancy of the African National Congress, the national "theatre" of the recently concluded Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the odor of violence and destruction, perhaps no longer visible, but omnipresent — are the backdrop of Kentridge's art.

Kentridge's artwork wends among the areas of drawing, theatre, and film. None of these media comprise a "primary" art; rather, each is melded with and becomes essential to the others, and creates a way for the artist to challenge himself to expand the capacities and boundaries of arts considered either static or performance-based, manipulated mechanically or by hand. Drawings spawn theatrical productions, or are filmed in the process of their making and remaking to create "drawings for projection."

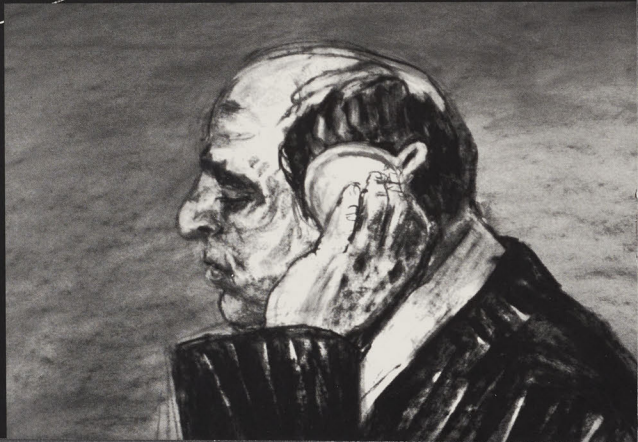
For Kentridge, the motivation to draw revolves around two primary questions: "How does one perform the dance of making the drawing; what is the energy needed to keep that sheet of paper alive?" And secondly, "what are the ways in which it can have sense and a meaning in the world?" While the artist has studied political science and African history, theatre, as well as printmaking and drawing, he cites the former two as being of primary importance to his art. Questions of the artist's materials and tools, such as what charcoal or fixative to use, are for him "very much the tertiary questions of what it means to be an artist."



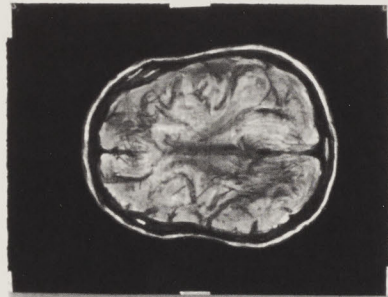
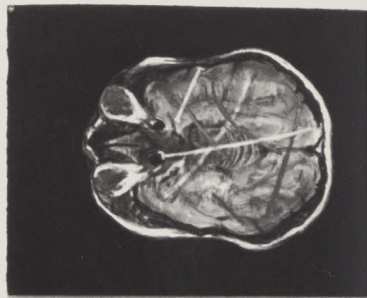
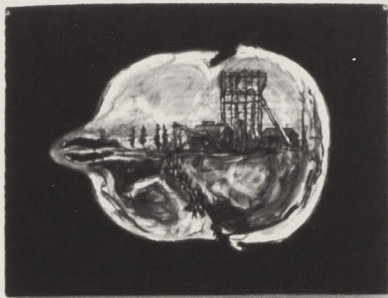
1.



3.



2.



4.



Untitled, 1997
Charcoal and pastel on paper
29 7/8 x 41 3/4 inches

WEIGHING...and WANTING is an installation of a series of drawings in charcoal, pastel, and gouache, drawn in a rough, expressionist manner, and a drawing for projection based on those drawings. In broad terms, **WEIGHING...and WANTING** allegorically deals with the charged relationship between oppressor and the oppressed in reference to the apartheid era, which lasted from 1948 to 1994. Kentrige has said of his work, "I have never tried to make illustrations of 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 certain endings; an art (and a politics) in which optimism is kept in check and nihilism at bay."

The drawings of **WEIGHING...and WANTING** center around Kentrige's fictional character Soho Eckstein, who has figured in six animated films the artist has made since 1989, from *Johannesburg, 2nd Greatest City After Paris* (1989) to *History of the Main Complaint* (1996). A broad-shouldered, white South African industrialist, Eckstein's self-assured place in a world in which he benefitted from the systematic oppression of the black African majority has been dismantled by the ascendancy of the African National Congress and condemnation of apartheid. Eckstein's story is related through his personal meditations on a failed love affair, the Johannesburg landscape which stands as a silent witness to the atrocities of the apartheid era, and his own internal psychic landscape, represented by images of MRI brain scans. The title of the exhibition refers to a biblical episode in which a disembodied hand appears before King Belshazzar of Babylon and writes a message on the wall. The message reads, "You have been weighed in the balance and found wanting, for you have not humbled your heart before God, so your kingdom has come to an end."

William Kentrige's drawings and films have been seen recently at the Sixth Havana Biennial, Cuba; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; The Drawing Center, New York; Palais des Beaux-arts, Brussels; Documenta X, Kassel; SITE Santa Fe, New Mexico; and the 1995 and 1997 Johannesburg Biennales at the Airicus Institute of Contemporary Art, Newtown, Johannesburg. A major retrospective exhibition that will tour U.S. museums is being planned for 2000.

WEIGHING...and WANTING was organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego.

Pictured on previous page

1. Image from **WEIGHING...and WANTING**, 1997
Film transferred to laser disk and projected
Dimensions variable
2. **Untitled**, 1997 (detail of one drawing from triptych)
Charcoal and pastel on paper
21 x 29 3/4 inches
3. Image from **WEIGHING...and WANTING**, 1997
Film transferred to laser disk and projected
Dimensions variable
4. **Untitled**, 1997 (installation view)
Charcoal, pastel, and gouache on paper
Four parts: 19 3/4 x 26 inches each



Untitled, 1997 (detail)
Charcoal and pastel on paper
48 1/4 x 63 inches

Selected Films

- 1996 History of the Main Complaint
- 1994 Felix in Exile
- 1991 Sobriety, Obesity, and Growing Old
- 1991 Mine
- 1990 Monument
- 1989 Johannesburg, 2nd Greatest City After Paris

Selected Theatrical Productions

- 1998 Il Ritorno Di Ulisse based upon the opera by Claudio Monteverdi, animation and direction by William Kentridge, musical direction Philippe Pierlot, with Handspring Puppet Company, Johannesburg; Organized by KunstenFESTIVAL des Arts, La Monnaie, France and Vienna, Austria. Premiered Festwochen, Luna Theatre, Brussels, Belgium, touring internationally.
- 1996 Ubu and the Truth Commission written by Jane Taylor, animation and direction by William Kentridge, conception by William Kentridge with the Handspring Puppet Company. Premiered in Weimar, Germany, touring internationally.
- 1995 Faustus in Africa!
Premiered in Weimar, Germany, toured internationally.
- 1992 Woyzeck on the Highveld from Georg Büchner's play Woyzeck with Handspring Puppet Company. Premiered Standard Bank National Festival of the Arts, Grahamstown, South Africa, toured internationally.

Further Reading on the Artist

2nd Johannesburg Biennale 1997. Trade Routes: History and Geography. (Johannesburg: Airicus Institute for Contemporary Art), 1997. Exhibition catalogue.

Carolyn Christov-Barkargiev. William Kentridge. (Brussels: Palais des Beaux-Arts), 1998. Exhibition catalogue.

Michael Godby, "William Kentridge's History of the Main Complaint: Narrative, Memory and Truth," in Sarah Nuttal and Carli Coetzee (eds.), Negotiating the Past: the Making of Memory in South Africa. (Cape Town: Oxford University Press), 1998.

Truce: Echoes of Art in an Age of Endless Confusion (New Mexico: SITE Santa Fe), 1997. Exhibition catalogue.

Sue Williamson. Resistance Art in South Africa (Cape Town, Johannesburg: David Philip), 1989.

Sue Williamson and Ashraf Jamal. Art in South Africa: The Future Present. (Cape Town, Johannesburg: David Philip), 1996.

Exhibition Checklist

WEIGHING...and WANTING, 1997

Mixed-media installation composed of two drawings and a video projection. Charcoal, pastel, gouache on paper, film transferred to video disc; dimensions variable. Collection Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego; Museum Purchase with funds from MCA Board of Trustees, 1997-98, in honor of Hugh M. Davies, 1998.15.1-5

Untitled from WEIGHING...and WANTING, 1997

16 drawings of charcoal and pastel on paper or charcoal, pastel, and gouache on paper of variable dimensions. Collection Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego or Collection Brenda and Michael Sandler.



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Printing: Arlington Lithograph Co., Inc.

Text citations from William Kentridge (CD-ROM).

David Krut, ed. (Johannesburg, Republic of
South Africa: David Krut Publishing), 1997.

Untitled, 1997 (detail)
Charcoal and pastel on paper
51 x 41 x 1 7/8 inches (framed)