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

Jennifer Riddell, Assistant Curator
MIT List Visual Arts Center

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.”
William Kentridge’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 Africus 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. Untitled, 1997
   Charcoal and pastel on paper
   29 3/4 x 41 3/4 inches
   Dimensions variable
   Film transferred to laser disk and projected

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
Selected Films
1996 History of the Main Complaint
1994 Felix in Exile
1991 Sobriety, Obesity, and Growing Old
1990 Mine
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 Handspan Puppet Company, Johannesburg; Organized by KunstenFESTIVAL des Arts, La Monnaie, France and Vienna, Austria. Premiered Festwochen, Luna Theatre, Brussels, Belgium, touring internationally.
1995 Faustus in Africa! Premiered in Weimar, Germany, toured internationally.

Further Reading on the Artist


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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Text citations from William Kentridge (CD-ROM).

Untitled, 1997 (detail)
Charcoal and pastel on paper
51 x 41 x 17/8 inches (framed)