

Press Release

William Kentridge. A Natural History of the Studio

On view across two locations, 1 May - 1 August 2025

542 West 22nd Street

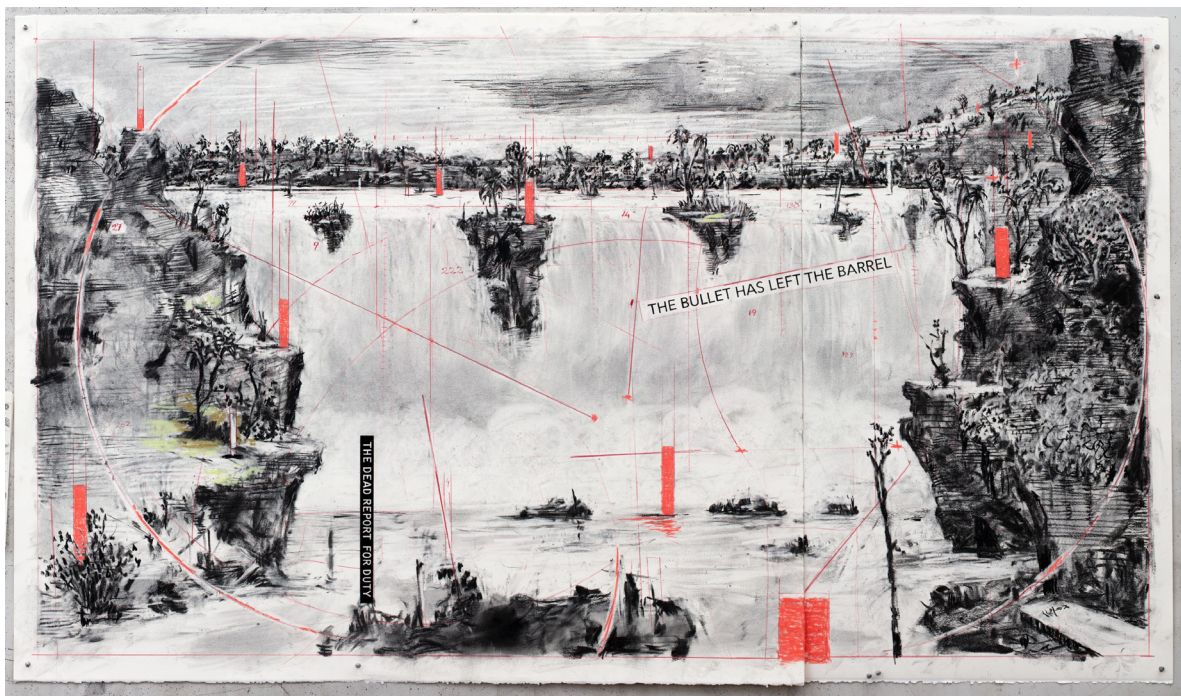
443 West 18th Street



New York... With 'A Natural History of the Studio,' his first exhibition with Hauser & Wirth in New York, renowned South African artist William Kentridge will present his acclaimed episodic film series 'Self-Portrait as a Coffee-Pot' with more than seventy works on paper integral to its creation and an array of sculptures at 542 West 22nd Street. This immersive exhibition is the first ever to present all the drawings from this filmic masterpiece, hailed by critics as a moving, witty and ultimately wondrous synthesis of the personal and the political, the individual and the universal. Spanning two floors of the gallery's 22nd Street building, 'A Natural History of the Studio' also extends to the gallery's 18th Street location with a concise survey of Kentridge's printmaking practice.

To mark this occasion, Hauser & Wirth Publishers will release a new artist's book that condenses the essence of 'Self-Portrait as a Coffee-Pot' through written dialogue and still images.





Conceived by the artist's longtime collaborator Sabine Theunissen, the installation design for the first floor of 'A Natural History of the Studio' at 22nd Street will include the charcoal drawings used in the animation of 'Self-Portrait as a Coffee-Pot' and evoke the feeling of being in Kentridge's working environment with him, a place where the walls hum with inspiration and every surface tells a story. Shot in his Johannesburg studio at the outset of the global COVID-19 pandemic and completed in 2024, the series includes nine thirty-minute episodes that bring viewers inside the artist's mind. Through a blend of Kentridge's signature stop-motion technique, live action performance and philosophical dialogue, 'Self-Portrait as a Coffee-Pot' delves into subjects like Greek mythology, the history of mining in Johannesburg, colonialism in Africa and Soviet absurdities. And here, as in his wider body of work, the seemingly mundane and familiar household coffee pot becomes a stand-in for the artist, an avatar of the art-making process in which a steady flow of ideas is akin to the bubbling of coffee brewing. In several episodes of the series, Kentridge is joined by collaborators and assistants; in others he is seen debating and squabbling with a series of doppelgängers in a playful externalization of his internal creative struggles. Thus, 'Self-Portrait as a Coffee-Pot' serves as both a celebration of creativity and a snapshot of Kentridge's pandemic experience.

The second floor of the exhibition will explore the relationship between drawing and sculpture in Kentridge's oeuvre. Among works on view here will be a selection of 'Paper Procession' sculptures. Made from aluminum panels fixed to a steel armature and hand-painted in vibrant oil paint, these works are based on a series of small-scale paper sculptures Kentridge made from pages of a 19th century accounting journal from the Chiesa di San Francesco Saverio in Palermo, Italy. The works feel like moving sketches—ephemeral yet powerful—and extend Kentridge's exploration of history, memory and transformation using humble materials to challenge grand narratives. The presentation will also include Kentridge's bronze 'glyphs' — sculptures of both everyday and arcane objects, words and icons that function together as a sort of visual glossary that can be arranged and re-arranged to construct different sculptural 'sentences.' The glyphs began as ink drawings and paper cut-outs that subsequently were cast in bronze and finished with a pitch-black patina evoking the hue of both ink and shadows. These glyphs also make an appearance in the single channel animated video on view titled 'Fugitive Words' (2024). The film opens with an overhead view of Kentridge's hands flipping through the pages of one of his many notebooks—a vital part of his creative process and an extension of his studio—where sketches, scores, diagrams, lists and phrases appear. The scene quickly develops into a dreamlike, non-narrative journey through the artist's mind, where fleeting words, shifting images and even his drawing tools come to life to create an evolving landscape of memory and transformation, all set to Beethoven's 'Archduke' piano trio.



A World in Prints at 18th Street

'A Natural History of the Studio' extends to Hauser & Wirth's nearby 18th Street location with a selection of thirty prints made by Kentridge over the last two decades. The artist first began printmaking while a student at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg and the medium has been integral to his practice ever since. Kentridge has experimented with a broad range of techniques in this realm, from etching to lithography, aquatint, drypoint, photogravure and woodcut, observing that, 'Printmaking...became a medium in which I could think, not merely a medium to make a picture... it has not been an adjunct to my other activities, but in many ways, it has been a central thread that has gone through the work I have done in the studio over the last 40 years.'

Many of the works on view at 18th Street revisit familiar personal iconography or directly reference other milestone projects, including the films on view at 22nd Street. The image of a typewriter, for example, dominates four print variations on view and is used as a metaphor for communication, historical record-keeping, and bureaucratic authority. Produced with master printmaker Mark Attwood in 2012 and given such titles as 'The Full Stop Swallows the Sentence' and 'Undo Unsay,' these works on paper are directly connected to Kentridge's film 'The Refusal of Time' (2012), a thirty-minute meditation on time and space, the complex legacies of colonialism and industry, and the artist's own intellectual life.

A series of lithographs titled 'Portraits for Shostakovich' (2022) was inspired by a 52-minute film made to accompany live performance of Dmitri Shostakovich's Symphony No.10. Titled 'Oh To Believe in Another World' (2022), that project also serves as the subject of episode 8 of 'Self-Portrait of a Coffee-Pot.' These colorful prints feature fractured portraits of Soviet intellectuals, members of the cultural avant-garde like the playwright and poet Mayakovsky, and politicians such as Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin.

The presentation at 18th Street also includes four self-portraits. Made in collaboration with Jillian Ross Print in 2023, these works employ photogravure, drypoint, and hand-painting techniques with collaged elements of photographs, drawings, and fragments of text – an approach that in its insistent layering evokes the construction of self and identity as a continual work in process, intertwined with and shaped by socio-political forces.

Editors note

This presentation follows special previews of 'Self-Portrait as a Coffee-Pot' at the Toronto International Film Festival and BFI London Film Festival. The complete series of films was first seen in an installation curated by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev at the Arsenale Institute for Politics of Representation in Venice, in conjunction with the 2024 Venice Biennale.



'Self-Portrait as a Coffee-Pot' was created and directed by William Kentridge, executive produced by Rachel Chanoff and Noah Bashevkin of The Office Performing Arts + Film, Joslyn Barnes of Louverture Films and the William Kentridge Studio. Walter Murch supervised the editing by South African digital artist Janus Fouché and Kentridge's regular collaborators Žana Marović and Joshua Trappier.

Hauser & Wirth would like to extend a special note of thanks to Goodman Gallery for their collaboration towards making this exhibition possible.

About the artist

Born in 1955 in Johannesburg, South Africa, where he currently lives and works, Kentridge grew up under the pall of apartheid. His practice has parsed and questioned the historical record—responding to the past as it ineluctably shapes the present—and created a world within his art that both mirrors and shadows the inequities and absurdities of our own. By employing varied mediums, Kentridge seeks to construct meaning through the use of historical resources, including maps, language and everyday imagery, while always maintaining a space for contradiction and uncertainty.

In 2016, he founded the Centre for the Less Good Idea in Johannesburg: a space for responsive thinking and making through experimental, collaborative and cross-disciplinary arts practices. The center hosts an ongoing program of workshops, public performances and mentorship activities.

Kentridge is the recipient of honorary doctorates from several universities including Yale, University of London and Columbia University. In 2010, he received the Kyoto Prize. In 2012, he was awarded the Commandeur dans l'ordre des Arts et des Lettres in France and he presented the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard University. In 2015, he was appointed an Honorary Academician of the Royal Academy in London. In 2017, he received the Princesa de Asturias Award for the arts and, in 2018, the Antonio Feltrinelli International Prize. In 2019, he received the Praemium Imperiale award in painting in Tokyo. In 2021, he was made a Foreign Associate Member to the French Académie des Beaux Arts, Paris. In 2022, he was presented the Ordine della Stella d'Italia and, in 2023, he received the Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in Opera in London. As the Slade Professor of Fine Art for 2023/2024, Kentridge delivered a series of six lectures at the University of Oxford in January and February 2024.

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His work can be found in the collections of public and private museums including Amorepacific Museum of Art (Seoul), Art Gallery of Western Australia (Perth), Art Institute of Chicago, Broad Art Foundation (Los Angeles), Carnegie Museum of Art (Pittsburgh), Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea (Turin), Centre Pompidou (Paris), Fondation Cartier (Paris), Fondation Louis Vuitton (Paris), Fundação Sorigue (Lerida), Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, Haus der Kunst (Munich), ICA Boston, Israel Museum (Jerusalem), JAG (Johannesburg), Kunsthalle Mannheim, Kunsthalle Praha (Prague), Kunstmuseum Basel, LACMA (Los Angeles), Louisiana Museum (Humlebaek), Luma Foundation (Arles), MAC (Montreal), MAXXI (Rome), Moderna Museet (Stockholm), MoCA (Los Angeles), MUDAM (Luxembourg), MoMA (New York), Museum of Fine Arts (Budapest), National Gallery of Australia (Canberra), National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa), National Museum of Modern Art (Kyoto), National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), Norval Foundation (Cape Town), San Diego Museum of Art, SFMoMA (San Francisco), Sharjah Art Foundation, Sifang Art Museum (Nanjing), Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam), Tate (London), Vehbi Koc Foundation (Istanbul) and Zeitz MOCAA (Cape Town), as well as private collections worldwide.

This summer, Yorkshire Sculpture Park in West Bretton UK will present 'The Pull of Gravity,' the first museum presentation outside South Africa to focus on Kentridge's sculpture. Bringing together over 40 works made between 2007 and 2024, this landmark project has been a decade in the making.

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Caption and courtesy information:

All images:

William Kentridge

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Still from Self-Portrait as a Coffee-Pot, Episode 1: A Natural History of the Studio

2020 - 2024

HD Video, 24 min

Carrier Pigeon

2019

Bronze

92.2 x 50 x 95 cm / 36 1/4 x 19 5/8 x 37 3/8 in

Photo: Oriol Tarridas Photography

Italics Plus

2024

Bronze, 43 parts

Overall: 100 x 280 x 28.5 cm / 39 3/8 x 110 1/4 x 11 1/4 in

Photo: Anthea Pokroy

Drawing for Self-Portrait as a Coffee-Pot (Waterfall)

2021

Charcoal, pastel and coloured pencil on paper

128 x 223 cm / 50 3/8 x 87 3/4 in

Photo: William Kentridge Studio

Three Clean Men

2024

Coffee-lift aquatint with drypoint on Phumani Sisal 120 gsm on

Hahnemühle 300 gsm

54 x 68 cm / 21 1/4 x 26 3/4 in

Photo: Anthea Pokroy

Self-Portrait as a Coffee-Pot III

2012

Hand-woven mohair tapestry

283 x 230 cm / 111 3/8 x 90 1/2 in

Photo: Thys Dullaart

Drawing for Self-Portrait as a Coffee-Pot (I Look in the Mirror, I Know What I Need)

2020

Tempera paint, charcoal, pastel, coloured pencil, dry pigment

and collage on paper

250 x 212 cm / 98 3/8 x 83 1/2 in

Photo: Thys Dullaart

Drawing for Self-Portrait as a Coffee-Pot (Set A of 16 drawings)

2020

Charcoal and coloured pencil on paper, 16 drawings

Each: 29 x 40 cm / 11 3/8 x 15 3/4 in approx.

Photo: Thys Dullaart