

William Kentridge: The Refusal of Time

A collaboration with Philip Miller, Catherine Meyburgh and Peter Galison.



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William Kentridge *The Refusal of Time* 2012. A collaboration with Philip Miller, Catherine Meyburgh and Peter Galison.
Five-channel video, with sound, 30 min; megaphones and breathing machine ("Elephant").
State Art Collection, Art Gallery of Western Australia (purchased through the TomorrowFund, Art Gallery of Western Australia Foundation, 2013).

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About the Exhibition

The Refusal of Time (2012) is a 30 minute, five-channel video installation that combines the magic of theatre, film, sculpture, drawing, music and dance. It addresses the elusive nature of time and our efforts to understand, control or deny it.

The immersive installation consists of five video projections and a layered soundtrack played through giant megaphones. Amidst the projections is a moving sculpture—a 'breathing machine'—with a pumping bellows beating at a constant tempo. Visually a sequence of 'movements' or 'acts' unfold in which animated charcoal drawings and paper cut-outs blend with live action film. *The Refusal of Time* begins with giant metronomes which tick in and out of sync and ends with a rhythmical march of silhouetted figures that carry and haul all manner of items, including a bathtub. The procession moves from screen to screen eventually encircling the viewer.

The work outlines a history of our changing comprehension of time – from an early understanding based on the sun and moon to Newton's mathematically precise time, from the subjective influence of Einstein to Britain's imposition of a universal time throughout its empire. It attempts to take the abstract idea of time and turn this into material to experiment with. Sound and film are slowed down, sped up or reversed. Video images are sometimes in sync and at other times move to alternating disjunctive rhythms.

The Refusal of Time was developed out of conversations between Kentridge and Harvard University science historian Peter Galison about the way science is riddled with poetic metaphors. It was made for *Documenta 13* in 2012, in collaboration with South African filmmaker Catherine Meyburgh, composer Philip Miller and dancer Dada Masilo.

About the Artist

William Kentridge was born in 1955 in Johannesburg, where he continues to live. His work draws on the history of art and the histories of the world as well as his personal experiences of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. Kentridge has become recognised for a diverse artistic practice, he works with and freely combines a wide range of media including drawing, printmaking, collage, animation, sculpture, film and theatre works.

Kentridge was a founding member of the Junction Avenue Theatre Company which began in 1975. The company has been involved in revealing many of South Africa's 'hidden histories' from an anti-apartheid perspective. Since 1992, Kentridge has collaborated with the Handspring Puppet Company creating multi media pieces using puppets, live actors and animation.

Kentridge is well known for a distinctive stop-motion animation technique in which a charcoal drawing is erased or redrawn in a series of tiny changes. The imperfect erasures of each stage of the drawing become a record of the progress of an idea and a record of the passage of time. In 1989, Kentridge began an ongoing series of animations using this technique, titled *Drawings for Projection*. These ten films document the struggle of two semi autobiographical characters amidst South Africa's changing social and political realities.

In 2010, Kentridge directed a new production of Dmitri Shostakovich's *The Nose* at the Metropolitan Opera (New York) which was widely praised by critics and also won acclaim for his 2005 production of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*.

Influences

- Kentridge's drawing style has been influenced by German Expressionist artists such as **Max Beckmann** (1884-1950) and **George Grosz** (1893-1959).
- He has acknowledged his interest in Spanish painter and printmaker **Francisco Goya** (1746-1828) as an artist whose work was politically charged and chronicled a particular moment in history, also as an artist who worked in graphic media.
- French filmmaker, actor and producer **George Méliès** (1861-1938) influenced Kentridge in his playful experiments with film. Méliès is famous for pioneering many technical and narrative developments in early cinema. In 2003 Kentridge completed a cycle of films titled *7 fragments for George Méliès* that emphasise live action and cinematic experiments while exploring the artist's process.

Pre/Post-Visit Activities

Drawing & Animation

Visual Art

Find out more about William Kentridge's creative process here:

http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2010/williamkentridge/flash/#creative_process

- Create a drawing in charcoal and then add a single colour. What effect does this touch of colour have on the finished drawing?
- Make a flip book using a small notepad. Create a sequence of drawings to animate a simple movement. Start by thinking about how the motion will start and how it will end.
- Experiment with Kentridge's animation technique (seen in the link above), erasing and redrawing a work to document the passage of time.

Collaboration

Social science, Visual Art, Sound Art, Drama, Dance, English

William Kentridge created *The Refusal of Time* with a team of collaborators.

- Why and how do we collaborate with others in our daily lives?
- Who were William Kentridge's collaborators for this work? What part did they play in the work?
- Collaboratively produce a short film or performance. Assign each contributor a role such as director, writer, set designer, actor or choreographer. How did allowing creative suggestions from each person influence the process?
- Create two different collaborative drawings with a group of classmates. In the first provide no expectation or rules for how it will be completed, what it should look like, or what the subject should be. For the second, establish a set of rules, procedures, and expectations for each person's contribution and the goal of the finished work. Compare the process and the end result of the two works. Reflect on the issues and solutions which arose in each scenario.

Processions

Social Science, Visual Art, Drama

The procession – a stream of figures weighed down with possessions, is a recurring motif in William Kentridge's work appearing in animated films, drawings, collages and prints.

- What are some of the reasons people might take part in a procession?
- What might the significance of the procession be in *The Refusal of Time*?
- Search online to find out more about some of Kentridge's other processional works.
- Create your own Kentridge-inspired procession. Who or what would your procession be made up of? What media would you use?

Further Information

Read an interview with William Kentridge in Art News New Zealand, Spring 2014

<http://www.artnews.co.nz/spring-2014-feature/>

Listen to Kim Hill's interview William Kentridge on National Radio <http://www.radionz.co.nz/national/programmes/saturday/audio/20146838/william-kentridge-art,-law-and-apartheid>

William Kentridge: The Refusal of Time, Editions Xavier Barral, 2012 ISBN 978-2-365111-007-5

William Kentridge: Fortuna, Lilian Tone, Thames and Hudson, 2013, ISBN 978-0-500-09396-4

<http://citygallery.org.nz/exhibitions/william-kentridge-refusal-time>