

WILLIAM KENTRIDGE

Waiting for the Sibyl and other histories

Galleria Lia Rumma | Via Stilicone 19 | MILANO

From June 4th 2020 by appointment only.

Lia Rumma Gallery is pleased to announce *Waiting for the Sibyl and other histories*: the new solo show by the South African artist William Kentridge, who consolidates his over-twenty-year relationship with Italy and the gallery.

Waiting for the Sibyl is the title of Kentridge's most recent project, commissioned by Teatro dell'Opera in Rome, which had its worldwide premiere last September as a companion piece to *Work in Progress* (1968), the only stage work conceived by the US sculptor Alexander Calder. Inspired by the movement and by the rotation of Calder's artworks, Kentridge evokes the priestess mentioned by Dante: the Cumean Sibyl, who used to write her prophecies for people's destinies on oak leaves. The leaves at the mouth of her cave were scattered by the wind, confusing the destinies of those who came to fetch them. This image becomes a symbol of uncertainty and of time that flows, mutates and returns.

In the eponymous video, shown for the first time in this exhibition (displayed on the ground floor of the gallery alongside preparatory drawings), the contemporary Sibyl has been portrayed as an African dancer. The figure dances against book pages, to jazz music composed by Kyle Shepherd and vocal compositions by Nhlanhla Mahlangu. Drawings in Indian ink describe trees with black branches and leaves that mutate and change. Kentridge notes that the contemporary equivalent of the Sibyl is the algorithm, which relentlessly predicts our fate. In contrast the drawings, some made on pages from Dante's *Divine Comedy*, show trees, leaves, animated objects, coloured geometrical forms and dancing silhouettes in mutation. They bring new life and humanity to the attempt of discovering our own fate and to the feelings of fear and anxiety that result from it.

On the first floor, the small set of bronze sculptures, like *Lexicon* (2017) and *Paragraph II* (2018), or the steel and aluminium sculptures titled *Leaf/Ampersand* (2019), and *Returning Leaf* (2019), consist of elements and signs supposedly static and suggestive of typographical fonts. As in the videos and drawings, they present different images according to the perspective chosen by the viewer. The charcoal *Processione di Riparazionisti* drawings were sketches made for the steel silhouettes of the monumental work of the same title conceived for the OGR in Turin. Presented here too is a series of maquette-sized figures in profile-cut steel, of the same procession. The works are dedicated to those who were employed in the profession of fixing trains in that site. The appearances of working women, men and machines, which are rigid but at the same time suggest movement and dynamism, remind us of our industrial history, of the working migration towards the North and of human fatigue: all themes dear to Kentridge.

The second floor of the Gallery is reserved for the immersive video installation titled *KABOOM!* (2018), adapted from the acclaimed theatrical production *The Head & the Load*, that premiered at the Tate Modern in 2018 and that tells the story of almost two million African people recruited by England, France and Germany during the First World War in Africa. By exploring personal and collective memory and by using the recurring topos of procession, Kentridge assembles dynamic layers of drawings, texts and moving images.

'The Head & the Load is about Africa and Africans in the First World War. That is to say about all the contradictions and paradoxes of colonialism that were heated and compressed by the circumstances of the war. It is about historical incomprehension (and inaudibility and invisibility). The colonial logic towards the black participants could be summed up: 'Lest their actions merit recognition, their deeds must not be recorded.' *The Head & the Load aims to recognise and record.*" — W.K.

William Kentridge's works first hit the international spotlight in 1997, when he took part in Documenta X in Kassel. Solo exhibitions of his work have followed on one after the other in museums and galleries around the world. Besides the projects above mentioned and among the Italian projects, we remember: the theatrical work and video *Zeno Writing* in 2002, from a reinterpretation of Italo Svevo's novel *Confessions of Zeno* (1923); the retrospective at Castello di Rivoli curated by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, in 2004; the direction and stage design for *The Magic Flute*, at the Teatro San Carlo in Naples and at the Teatro alla Scala in Milan (2006-2008); the (REPEAT) *From the Beginning / Da Capo* project presented at Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa and at the Teatro la Fenice in Venice and curated by Francesca Pasini, in 2008; *Streets of the city e altri arazzi*, solo show Museo di Capodimonte in 2009; the large mosaics and the sculpture *Il Cavaliere di Toledo*, permanent installations at the metro station in Naples; the solo exhibition *Vertical Thinking* at MAXXI in Rome in 2013; in 2014, *Paper Music: a Cinè Concert*, with music by Philip Miller, presented at Museo Bargello in Florence; finally, the monumental and ephemeral work *Triumph and Laments*, presented in 2016 on the Lungotevere in Rome. In 2010 Kentridge received the prominent Kyoto Prize for Arts and Philosophy and in 2017 the Princess of Asturias Award for the Arts and in 2019 the Praemium Imperiale award in painting in Tokyo. On view, the following Kentridge solo shows: *William Kentridge: Why Should I Hesitate? Putting Drawings to Work / Sculpture* at Zeitz MOCAA and at the Norval Foundation in Cape Town and: *A Poem that Is Not Our Own* at the Musée Metropole d'art moderne in Lille.

