William Kentridge
Five Themes
29 June – 5 September 2010
South African artist William Kentridge (born 1955) first achieved international recognition in the 1990s with a series of what he called “drawings for projection”: short animated films based on everyday life under apartheid. Since then, Kentridge has widened his thematic range, expanding beyond his immediate environment to examine other political conflicts. His oeuvre charts a universal history of war and revolution, evoking the complexities and tensions of postcolonial memory and imaging the residual traces of devastating policies and regimes.

The first retrospective in France devoted to the artist is centred on the broad themes that have motivated Kentridge during his career, through a large choice of works dating from the late 1980s to today. While putting the accent on recent pieces, it highlights the broad scope of Kentridge’s artistic practice and diversity of media, including drawing, film, collage, printmaking, sculpture and stage design. Kentridge’s longstanding interest in theatre – nurtured in South Africa in the 1970s, when he co-founded the Junction Avenue Theatre Company, and invigorated by more recent collaborations with the Handspring Puppet Company – informs the dramatic character of his art. He remains one of the rare figures to successfully bridge the fields of visual art, film and theatre. Instead of simply alternating these artistic means of expression, he moves freely between them, shifting from theatre to drawing or from drawing to film. Though his work resonates with the South African experience, Kentridge also draws on varied European sources, including literature, opera, theatre and early cinema, to create a complex universe where good and evil are complementary and inseparable forces.

An important conceptual development in Kentridge’s practice of recent years is the artist’s self-reflexive yet playful focus on his relationship to the world. Whereas the early charcoal animations operated with a cast of fictional characters, Kentridge himself now appears as the principal character in his own creations. By referencing optical illusion and the mechanics of perception, in his latest works, Kentridge moves beyond the characteristic manipulations of animation to create a world conceived as a theatre of memory.

Parcours d’Atelier: Artist in the Studio
In these works Kentridge uses the classic genre of self-portraiture to explore the unfolding of his artistic process within the parameters of the studio. Here he becomes his own unabashed subject, dramatising and portraying his creative work. As Kentridge notes: “The studio is an enclosed space, not just physically but also psychically, like an enlarged head; the pacing in the studio is the equivalent of ideas spinning round in one’s head.”
The process that precedes the making of an artwork is the theme of 7 Fragments for Georges Méliès (2003), a homage to the early French film director known for his cinematic tricks. Kentridge pays tribute to Méliès’ silent movies, such as A Trip to the Moon (1902), in which the director himself performed in front of painted sets. The films Day for Night and Journey to the Moon (2003) demonstrate an exchange between process and product that is echoed in Kentridge’s games with reversals of time and tone. In one example, inverted footage of ants transforms into a bright constellation of stars in a night sky. In another, the artist dramatises his “studio walks”, pacing back and forth between his camera and the wall where the drawings that become his animations are pinned.

**Thick Time: Soho and Felix**

In 1989, with the creation of Johannesburg, 2nd Greatest City after Paris, Kentridge launched a cycle of short animated films (presented in the auditorium of the Jeu de Paume) that introduce us to his iconic fictional characters Soho Eckstein, a greedy capitalist and property tycoon whose troubled conscience reflects certain aspects of contemporary South Africa, and his sensitive alter ego, Felix Teitlebaum, who pines for Soho’s wife. Felix often functions as a surrogate for the artist himself but, as Kentridge says of his characters, “There’s part of me in each of them... or they’re both in me.” Nine films, some preparatory drawings for which are shown here, follow Soho and Felix as they struggle to navigate the political and social climate of Johannesburg during the final decade of apartheid. It was with these films that Kentridge established his improvisational working method and signature use of stop-motion animation. Through the movement of successive charcoal-drawn images he evokes the local mining industry, suggesting eroding landscapes with a continual process of wiping away and reworking. The final state of each drawing becomes a record of this painstaking process of erasure and addition – a palimpsest of the emotional tension between forgetting and remembering.

**Occasional and Residual Hope: Ubu and the Procession**

In 1975 Kentridge acted in Ubu Rex, an adaptation of Ubu Roi, Alfred Jarry’s 1888 satire about a corrupt and cowardly despot. Twenty years later Kentridge returned to this material, grounding it in a new context: the public hearings held by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the mid-1990s to investigate human rights abuses under apartheid. “From a South African perspective,” he explains, “Ubu is a particularly powerful metaphor for the insane policy of apartheid, presented by the state as a rational system.”

In 1996, Kentridge developed a series of etchings entitled Ubu Tells the Truth, in which he monumentalised the figure of Ubu. Each etching
Portage (detail), 2000

superimposes two representations of Ubu: the first is inspired by photographs that the artist took of himself playing the role in his studio and the second, apparently drawn in chalk, is based on Jarry’s own drawings of his blunt and absurd literary character. In his multipanel collages and bronze sculptures, the procession of black figures evokes the political and cultural volatility of that moment in South African history, while also alluding to universal conditions of protest and migration.

Sarastro and the Master’s Voice: The Magic Flute

The works presented here evolved from Kentridge’s 2005 production of Mozart’s opera The Magic Flute. Three sculptural objects – two miniature theatres and a film installation – alternate projections to create an extended theatrical cycle. Learning the Flute (2003) serves as the overture or introductory act. Projected onto a blackboard, the film becomes a sketchbook for the production as a whole. Preparing the Flute (2005) was originally created as a large-scale model for testing the projections central to Kentridge’s staging of the opera. By contrasting positive and negative film and emphasising the symbolic conflict between the Queen of the Night and Sarastro, the high priest of light, these projects explore the dualistic terms of Enlightenment morality dramatised by Mozart.

If the Flute works engage the dialectics of the Enlightenment, a second miniature theatre, Black Box / Chambre Noire (2005), demonstrates the darker side of its political trajectories. According to Kentridge, this installation looks at “the damages of colonialism, which described its predations to itself as bringing enlightenment to the Dark Continent.” To that end, Black Box references the 1904-07 rebellion and subsequent genocide of the Herero peoples in German South-West Africa (present-day Namibia). Acting as a coda to The Magic Flute, the installation What Will Come (has already come) (2007) considers Mussolini’s invasion of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) in 1935 during the Italian fascist era. Warped images projected onto a flat surface reconstitute themselves in a cylindrical mirror, suggesting the cyclical nature of history and its potential for distortion.

Learning from the Absurd: The Nose

Kentridge’s most recent work relates to his staging of Dmitri Shostakovich’s opera The Nose at the Metropolitan Opera in New York in spring 2010. First performed in 1930, the opera based on Nikolai Gogol’s absurdist short story of 1836 concerns a Saint Petersburg official whose nose disappears one morning, only to turn up as a higher-ranking official who refuses to return to his face. With I am not me, the horse is not mine (2008), an installation made up of eight film fragments, Kentridge notes that it “takes Gogol’s short story, its literary forebears, and its possible future histories as the basis for looking at the formal inventiveness of the different strains of Russian modernism, and also at the calamitous end
of the Russian avant-garde.” The work’s title comes from a traditional Russian saying used to deny guilt, which Kentridge found in the transcripts of Nikolai Bukharin’s 1937 testimony before the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist party. (One of the films presents excerpts from these transcripts.) Drawing on the bold graphic sensibility of Russian constructivist art, Kentridge combines stop-motion animation of paper cutout figures with archival footage and live-action film to create vibrant imagery all his own.

**autour de l’exposition**

- **book signing** with William Kentridge at Jeu de Paume bookstore
  Tuesday 29 June, 6 pm

- **conversation** between William Kentridge and Denis Hirson, writer, in the auditorium
  Tuesday 29 June, 7 pm

- “Le temps, un processus de création chez William Kentridge”: thematic tour* by a Jeu de Paume lecturer
  Tuesday 27 July, 7 pm

- “Les événements politiques dans l’œuvre de Bruno Serralongue et William Kentridge”: thematic tour* by a Jeu de Paume lecturer
  Tuesday 24 August, 7 pm

- **publication**: William Kentridge, cinq thèmes edited by Mark Rosenthal
  co-edition 5 Continents/Éditions du Jeu de Paume
  softbound with hardcover, 24 x 26 cm, 264 pages, 45 €

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**screening in the auditorium**

**9 Drawings for Projection**

cycle of 9 films, 65'32” (in loop)

- Johannesburg, 2nd Greatest City after Paris, 1989 (8’02”)
- Monument, 1990 (3’11”)
- Mine, 1991 (5’50”)
- Sobriety, Obesity & Growing Old, 1991 (8’22”)
- Felix in Exile, 1994 (8’43”)
- History of the Main Complaint, 1996 (5’50”)
- WEIGHING... AND WANTING, 1998 (6’20”)
- Stereoscope, 1999 (8’22”)
- Tide Table, 2003 (8’50”)

Every day (except Monday), from 29 June to 5 September

Tuesday: from 12.05 am to 8.50 pm
Wednesday to Friday: from 12.15 am to 6.50 pm
Saturday and Sunday: from 10.05 am to 6.50 pm

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**William Kentridge at the Louvre**

1 July – 30 August 2010
Denon wing, first floor, room 33 /
Sully wing, first floor, room 26
information: +33 (0)1 40 20 53 17 / www.louvre.fr
Neuflize Vie, Jeu de Paume’s global partner, supports this exhibition.

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This exhibition has been realised in partnership with:

Jeu de Paume – Concorde

1 Place de la Concorde, 75008 Paris
access via the Tuileries Gardens, Rue de Rivoli entrance
www.jeudepaume.org
information +33 (0)1 47 03 12 50
Tuesday (late opening) noon–9 pm
Wednesday to Friday noon–7 pm
Saturday and Sunday 10 am–7 pm
closed Monday
admission: 7 € – concession: 5 €
admission free to the exhibitions of the Satellite programme
Mardis Jeunes: free entrance for students and visitors under 26 every last Tuesday of the month from 5 pm to 9 pm

exhibitions
29 June – 5 September 2010
William Kentridge, Five Themes
Bruno Serralongue: Campfires
Satellite Programme, Klara Lidén: Always Be Elsewhere

31 March – 17 November 2010
Virtual Space, Agnès de Cayeux: Alissa, Discussion with Miladus, Elot/120/211/501
www.jeudepaume.org and in the resources room

Tours for individual visitors*: from Tuesday to Saturday at 12.30 pm
Family Tours*: Saturday at 3.30 pm

forthcoming exhibitions
28 September 2010 – 6 February 2011
André Kertész
False Friends / A Temporary Videotheque
Satellite Programme, Tomo Savić-Gecan

Curator: Mark Rosenthal

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Jeu de Paume – Monnaie de Paris

exhibition
16 April – 22 August 2010
Willy Ronis, a Poetics of Engagement
Monnaie de Paris
11 Quai de Conti, 75006 Paris
information: +33 (0)1 40 46 56 66 / www.monnaiedeparis.fr
Tuesday to Sunday 11 am–7 pm
Thursday (late opening) 11 am–9.30 pm
closed Monday
admission: 7 € – concessions: 5 €

exhibitions
29 May – 7 November 2010
Nadar, Rule and Caprice
Château de Tours
25 Avenue André Malraux, 37000 Tours
information: +33 (0)2 47 70 88 46 / www.jeudepaume.org
Tuesday to Sunday 1 pm–6 pm
admission: 3 €; concessions: 1.50 €

15 July – 24 October 2010
Camille Silvy, Photographer of Modern Life, 1834–1910
National Portrait Gallery
St Martin’s Place, WC2H 0HE London
information: www.npg.org.uk

forthcoming exhibitions
9 September – 24 October 2010
Willy Ronis: On that Day
Maison d’Art Bernard Anthonioz, Nogent-sur-Marne
www.ma-bernardanthonioz.com/fr/

28 November 2010 – 1 May 2011
André Kertész, the Intimate Pleasure of Reading
Zola Photographer
Château de Tours

* free entrance on presentation of exhibition ticket (valid on the day of purchase only) and for members; Family Tours, by reservation on +33 (0)1 47 03 12 41 / serviceeducatif@jeudepaume.org

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