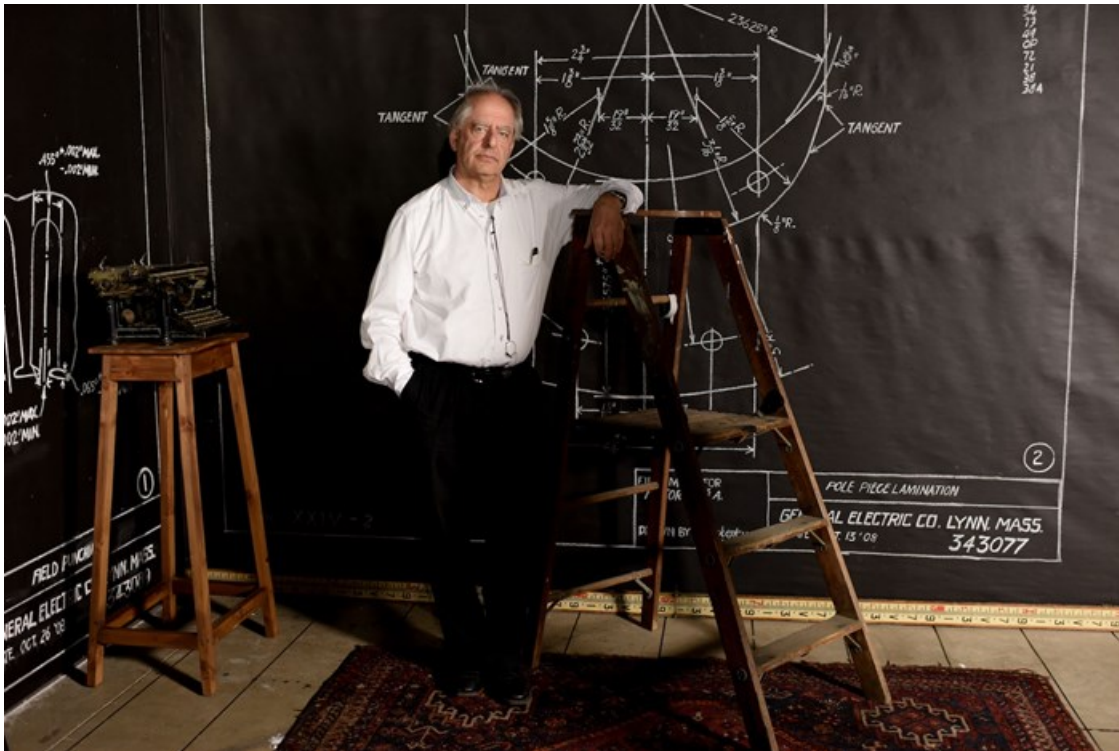


William Kentridge talks inspiration for upcoming exhibition

The largest single exhibition of William Kentridge's work will soon open in Cape Town.

A collection of his sculptural work titled *Why Should I Hesitate? Sculpture* will be on exhibition at the Norval Foundation from 24 August 2019, while a collection of his drawings – *Why Should I Hesitate? Putting Drawings To Work* – will be on show at the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa (Zeitz MOCAA).

Recently, the artist took the time to respond to questions – from Norval Foundation curator Karel Nel and Zeitz MOCAA Curator Azu Nwagbogu – on the inspiration for his works.



The first exhibition internationally to address your output as a sculptor will be on display at Norval Foundation in August. What has informed the development of your sculptural output over the years?

The origins of the sculpture that I've done. A lot of the early work that I did had to do with either silhouettes or shadows. And

shadows by their nature are immaterial, simply an absence of light, a blockage of the light. And the sculptures started as a way of making this immaterial substance, or void, a shadow into a solid weighty material object.

This was usually done by taking the shape of a shadow or a silhouette – a silhouette of the shadow you could say – and extruding it outwards onto paper, into cardboard into wax on paper or cloth so that the image which had no dimensionality or it had only two-dimensionality gets extruded and given a weight in the third dimension. This was the basis of most of the sculptures, which is to say that they're the sculptures of a draftsman rather than a pure sculptor.



Three-dimensionality is an essential attribute of them, but they usually start as a drawing. And this has expanded from making the sculptures thicker and heavier to feel the weight of a word and to feel the weight of an image. The usual transformation has been from cardboard or cloth or wax into bronze, but there are also steel sculptures, steel cut-outs, welded steel sculptures, some *assemblages* of wood and twigs, some of which remain as these rough assemblages, some of which then get cast.

Several sculptures are made in cardboard, cast in bronze and painted to look like sculptures. There are also virtual sculptures in which the sculptural three-dimensionality only exists in the viewer's brain. Two flat images that are pushed into a third dimension through various stereoscopic means.

So the push towards sculpture has been both questions of perception, the apparent illusion of three-dimensionality in these virtual sculptures, wanting to find a weight of immaterial objects, both a physical weight and I suppose a kind of moral of these objects.



Largest William Kentridge exhibition comes to Cape Town in August

8 May 2019



Who would you say are the artists who have most profoundly influenced your sculptural output?

It's difficult to say who's influenced me. There are artists I've looked at whose work I've looked at a huge amount. Of course, Picasso's sculptures are central to this, particularly his first painted glasses of absinthe which are a wonderful

mixture of sculpture, painting and assemblage.

The later sculptures of Cy Twombly stay as a very strong thought in my head. Alexander Calder becomes increasingly important as a way of thinking about movement and sculpture.

And no one can think about sculpture without thinking about Alberto Giacometti in the 20th century. But the central sculpture I suppose that sits in my head as one of the great works of the last 100 years is Picasso's sculpture of the nanny goat made out of the assemblage of pots and baskets found in the rubbish heap next to his studio.

Your work seems both political and philosophical. How have these two disciplines shaped your vision as an artist, and as a sculptor?

As an artist, I think one always works in two directions or three directions, the third one being the pressure cooker of the studio in which the first two elements come together. So the one is the world coming towards you.

These are both personal events, political events, social events, everything that happens around you in the world – which is invited into the studio, some of which are political, some which are philosophical. The nature of certainty and uncertainty, marginal thinking, peripheral thinking to go with peripheral vision.



The other element is, of course, the history of image-making. How one's brain is filled not only with images of the outside world but with ways that they have represented over the years by artists from different cultures, traditions, and histories.

And all of these sit together in one's head and the studio becomes the kitchen in which the different ingredients are cooked.

So some of the sculptures are primarily concerned with natures of perception, what is a two-dimensional image that is hidden inside a three-dimensional unrecognisable object.

In other words, which objects can you only see when you become monocular or when you close one eye. This, of course, relates to the single-eyed vision of baroque theatre designs and single-point perspective – which are both questions of philosophical understandings of the world and ways of representing it.

Why is drawing still central to your practice as an artist and further to that, what role does new media play in your working practice as an artist? As a corollary, what does materiality mean to you as an artist and how is this represented in this exhibition?

Drawing is the starting point for the project. It's a way of thinking in the material. In my case, very often charcoal which has the flexibility of being erased as quickly and easily as you can change your mind and have a new thought.

So it's a way of thinking aloud. I rely on the process of drawing to generate thoughts – which may end up as charcoal drawings or may end up as sculptures or tapestries or films or pieces of theatre.



It is always a question of finding a material in which to think. Whether it is an actor's body, a gesture, torn paper or ink. There must be a connection between the particular qualities of the material and the thematics that are under investigation.

The thematics around your work are often around the ambiguity of power and its shifting structures; those who wield it which changes but always seem to remain the same. Do you think of your work as a collection of fables? But fables are based on fiction whereas your work is rooted in history. How do fact and fiction interplay in your work?

I hadn't thought of my work as a collection of fables, but I'm not unhappy to have that description. It's a bit like Theodore Adorna's *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*. So they're moral fables except that I don't know what the moral is of the stories that I tell.

And the works are done to try to not only find out what the moral is, but what the question is behind the moral. The ambiguity of moral positions is very often what is revealed.



All things can come in to the studio – which includes both the world of news reporting and fact in that sense, archival material, photographic records of events but also dreams, thoughts, novels, poems – all have an equal status in the studio in terms of being raw material for a new drawing or film.

Which has always an intermediate and indeterminate status of being between fact and fiction and has the facticity of the artwork.

Can you tell us about the importance of the Centre for the Less Good Idea and its role in your practice and this is represented in this major exhibition?

The Centre For The Less Good Idea is playing an important part in the cultural life of Johannesburg and is an alternative to the larger more established institutions that are there.

But it is not part of the exhibition *Why Should I hesitate*. It would need a separate exhibition.

It would need a space primarily of performance rather than of exhibition. So whereas there are public showings outside of the centre itself, of the work that it does, that's a new project to undertake.

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