



Universal Archive and Journey to the Moon are complementary projects by internationally acclaimed artist William Kentridge. They represent part of his vast and interrelated body of work in film, theatre, opera, drawing, printmaking, and sculpture that challenges notions of reason and knowledge construction and raises skepticism about certainty and rational thought.



EXHIBITION CHEKLIST

Voyage to the Moon, 2003, 16mm and 35mm film, video, and DVD transfer, 7:10.

Universal Archive, 2012, linocuts on pages from the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary and the Encyclopedia Britannica.

FURTHER READING

William Kentridge, *Six Drawing Lessons. The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures*, 2012 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).

Lilian Tone, ed., with William Kentridge and Kate McCrickard, *William Kentridge: Fortuna* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2013).

Kate McCrickard, *William Kentridge* (London: Tate Publishing, 2012).

Mark Rosenthal, ed., *William Kentridge: Five Themes* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Art; and West Palm Beach: Norton Museum of Art, 2009).

Dan Cameron, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, and J.M. Coetzee, *William Kentridge* (London: Phaidon, 1999).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Journey to the Moon courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

Exhibitions at The Trout Gallery are supported in part by Dickinson College, the Ruth Trout Endowment, the Helen E. Trout Memorial Fund, and the Friends of The Trout Gallery. Educational programming presented through the Mumper-Stuart Education Center at The Trout Gallery.

Cover: William Kentridge, *Universal Archive, Ref 2*, 2013, linocut printed on page from the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*.

Interior fold: Still photo from *Journey to the Moon*. Installation photo by Andrew Bale.

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THE TROUT GALLERY
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WILLIAM KENTRIDGE

Universal Archive
Journey to the Moon



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THE TROUT GALLERY
THE ART MUSEUM OF DICKINSON COLLEGE

UNIVERSAL ARCHIVE (2012)

“[S]ince light travels at an invariant speed . . . all of space is a universal archive of all that happened on earth. . . . Every action, heroic or shameful, was there to be seen. . . .”

—WK on Felix Eberty



Universal Archive: 12 Coffee Pots, 2012

Kentridge’s *Universal Archive* presents a series of linocut images printed onto pages from dictionaries and encyclopedias. The images (coffee pots, trees, cats, horses, typewriters, birds, nudes, self-portraits) are frequent characters in the artist’s lexicon and appear in a range of ways, from highly descriptive to improvisational and gestural. They are the result of experimentation, play, gesture, and dialogue with the object represented, with previous and future representations, and with the viewer’s sensibilities and responses to them. With these prints, Kentridge considers the role of the artist and the viewer in the creative process, and how we make sense of what we see and comprehend. He stresses

[n]ot just the obvious agency in making, but in the possible agency also in seeing. The understanding of that which is not seen, and being aware of the limits of seeing. And being caught up, as with the image of the horse: being fooled, seeing the typewriter and knowing we are being fooled, by being made aware of our part in the construction of the image; of our part in the construction of the illusion, but most importantly, of the activity of ourselves. It is the gap between the object and its representation that this energy emerges, the gap we fill in, in the shift from the monochromatic shadow to the color of the object, from its flatness to its depth and heft.

Allowing us to be neither the prisoners in the cave, unable to comprehend what we see, nor the all-seeing philosopher returning with all his certainty. But allowing us to inhabit the terrain in between, the space between what we see on the wall and what we conjure up behind our retinas.

The images, however, are not printed on a blank sheet of paper; they appear over columns of text, and become part of a visual dialogue. But unlike the tiny illustrations that accompany dictionary entries, Kentridge’s calligraphic images obscure the underlying words, play outside the columns, and challenge the authoritative text. Indeed, some of the prints represent a successive overlaying and integrating of text and image, creating a visual cacophony. This interplay of text and image serves as a metaphor of the interaction between rational and creative processes.

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Universal Archive is one of Kentridge’s many projects that impose images over text as a means to explore the limits of rational thinking, the danger of certainty, and the role of “fortuna” in shaping knowledge. Others include *Greek Lexicon* (Drawing Lesson 45), *Marvelles de la Science/Ref: 14/05/2010* (Drawing Lesson 32), *Portage*, and *Journey to the Moon*.

JOURNEY TO THE MOON (2003)

is a short film that focuses on the nature of the creative process. Here, Kentridge contemplates his future work along the lines of a journey within his own studio, where he explores the unknown (i.e., creativity in a “post-anti-apartheid” world). His point of departure is Georges Méliès’s *Voyage dans la Lune* (1902), the pioneering French film that presents lunar exploration as an adventure-seeking, colonizing endeavor into outer space. Although *Voyage dans la Lune* provides the basis for Kentridge’s exploration, the viewer soon discovers that unlike Méliès’s Paris, Kentridge’s Johannesburg offers no place for a heroic narrative.

Méliès’s moon was “a late nineteenth-century colonial moon . . . my lunar landscape is . . . just outside Johannesburg.”

Méliès opens his film with scientists engaged in an academic discussion, debating the means of reaching the moon. They draw chalkboard diagrams and use long telescopes to plan their mission. Likewise, Kentridge begins by consulting an authoritative-looking book to chart his adventure to the lunar surface. As he runs his hands over the pages, images—the moon, tide charts, a pregnant woman—appear and cover the text (like the dictionary pages of the *Universal Archive*). To gain a better perspective, Kentridge uses his coffee cup as a viewing device to more closely examine the pages and to observe the night sky. (1)

To reach the moon, Méliès’s scientists build a giant rocket. Kentridge, meanwhile, uses his coffee pot/studio/spaceship to reach his destination. They end up crashing their spaceships into the face of the Man-in-the-Moon/face-of-the-artist respectively. (2)

Upon reaching the lunar surface, Méliès’s scientists wage war against a band of moon natives, who capture the scientists and bring them to their leader. Ultimately, the scientists destroy the leader and flee his court. Kentridge, on the other hand, never leaves the safety of his spaceship; with his coffee cup, he peers through the window of his spaceship onto the desolate landscape of Johannesburg. (3)



Méliès’s scientists escape the lunar world and return triumphantly to a hero’s welcome in Paris. Kentridge, however, remains in his studio on the surface of Johannesburg. Despite visits from a muse, he is burdened by the weight of a world he thought he had escaped. He discovers that a rational approach cannot not resolve



Stills from *Voyage dans la Lune* (1902) / *Journey to the Moon* (2003)

WILLIAM KENTRIDGE (b. 1955)

is foremost a political artist. He draws extensively from the visual language of the Expressionists and the Dadaists, with an eye towards Weimar Germany. His work also bears the influence of earlier satirists, such as Francisco Goya, Honoré Daumier, and William Hogarth. His devotion to such Enlightenment/modernist material, however, is checked by a post-modern critique of colonialism, industrialization, idealism, historicism, and the scientific method.

“I am interested in a political art, that is to say an art of ambiguity, contradiction, uncomplicated gestures, and uncertain endings.”

While Kentridge identifies with the Expressionists of the first half of the twentieth century, he is not to be counted among the Neo-expressionists—American and European painters of the 1980s, who rejected post-war minimalism and conceptual art and embraced a painterly approach to figural painting. Spending almost all of his life in Johannesburg, Kentridge was on the margins of such trends. His interest in politics, political art of the past, the role of the viewer, and a deep involvement with the theater, led him directly to a figurative mode, one in which the human form plays a central role as a vehicle for ideas.

“[A]ll my work is rooted in this rather desperate provincial city.”

Kentridge was born and raised in Johannesburg, South Africa, where he witnessed the brutal conditions of apartheid and the aftermath of a post-apartheid world. Of Lithuanian-Jewish parents, Kentridge belonged neither to the dominant Christian white minority nor the oppressed black majority. He lived in what he called a state of “marginality . . . [at the] edge of huge social upheavals yet also removed from them.” This separation was in part mediated by the work of his parents, both highly prominent attorneys, who led a number of anti-apartheid efforts and represented Nelson Mandela and the family of Stephen Biko.

Kentridge studied politics and African history at the University of Witwatersrand (Johannesburg) and fine arts at the Johannesburg Art Foundation and the École Jacques Lecoq (Paris). He lives and works in Johannesburg.

creative problems. From his spaceship window, he watches a column of characters (his own studio inventions) wander through a landscape defined by generations of misery. He wonders (in response to Theodor Adorno’s claim that after Auschwitz there could be no poetry) if creativity is possible, and if so, how to proceed. (4)