

Trees / Headlines / Heads

with drawings, woodcuts and sculptures by **William Kentridge**

Photographs by Helge Mundt from the artist's studio and his
'THE CENTRE FOR THE LESS GOOD IDEA' in Johannesburg will also be on display.

17th December 2025 – 23rd January 2026 / extended until 3rd February 2026

On 8 January 2026, Dr Tobias Burg (Curator of the Graphic Arts Collection, Museum Folkwang, Essen) will give a lecture on the topic of IF YOU HAVE NO EYE – MUSIC IN THE WORK OF WILLIAM KENTRIDGE.



'We are all visual artists, whether we are aware of it or not. And we owe an incredible debt to the Dada movement. They greatly expanded the definition of what it means to be an artist. Thanks to them, we now know that my artwork can be a poem, a piece of music, or a performance.'

William Kentridge

Photo: Helge Mundt, Hamburg

William Kentridge became known for his animated films, for which he subjects charcoal drawings to a characteristic process of erasing and covering. In a dynamic interplay, he deconstructs and reassembles image forms in his art, jumping back and forth between media and disciplines. His work has a distinctly narrative character in its treatment of themes relating to history, time and the absurdities of a world of great certainties. His works are mirrors that reflect our deepest paradoxes, which Kentridge always addresses from the perspective of his South African homeland. His visual language is both intellectually and emotionally moving. The starting point and creative basis of his work is drawing.

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William Kentridge, *Lexicon of Trees III*, 2025
Indian ink on found paper, 30,5 x 22,3 cm

With his *Lexicon of Trees*, William Kentridge revisits one of the central motifs of his oeuvre – the tree as a symbol of memory, growth and rootedness. Since the early 1990s, trees have frequently appeared as a central element in the artist's drawings, films and stage designs – as a living archive of human experience that embodies both vulnerability and permanence. The combination of black ink and the yellowed pages of an old dictionary creates a tension between language and nature, knowledge and transience, which reveals Kentridge's artistic thinking.

The twelve drawings exhibited in the Drawing Room show variations on this theme: gnarled figures, some weathered by the wind, asserting themselves like memories in the flow of time on the printed pages. Each tree has the character of an improvised musical score – spontaneous, rhythmic, yet imbued with a deep poetic rigour. In this series of works, Kentridge deepens his exploration of drawing as a trace and movement of thought. As in his animated films, the trees become witnesses to a continuous process of creation and decay. They are rooted in paper, which itself is a carrier of history, and unfold as fragile signs of human existence.

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William Kentridge, *Headlines* (4), 2025
Woodcut on digital print, 47 x 32.4 cm
Edition of 16 copies + 2 AP, signed and numbered



William Kentridge's portfolio *Headlines* is a six-part edition of woodcuts printed over reproductions of the Neue Zürcher Zeitung newspaper from 1 February 1916. That month saw the opening of the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, the birthplace of the Dada movement. This date marks the beginning of a radically new way of thinking that manifested itself not only in the visual arts, but also in theatre, literature and performance – a new understanding of the world and expression. Kentridge's work is also interdisciplinary and strongly influenced by Dadaism, which includes not only the absurd and the paradoxical, but also stylistic elements such as collage and the fragmentation of language. In terms of content, Kentridge links historical and contemporary references in this series: some texts are taken from Tristan Tzara's Dada Manifesto of 1916, others from the opening lines of Kurt Schwitters' Dadaist Ursonate of 1932. Another reference leads to THE CENTRE FOR THE LESS GOOD IDEA, an experimental art centre founded by Kentridge in Johannesburg.

What is important to you about Dadaism?

The absurd. Because my works cannot be rationally analysed or explained either, and if you try to do so anyway, it no longer makes rational sense. This kind of collage of nonsense is important to me. Connecting things that do not belong together is the culmination of the Dadaist era shortly before the beginning of the Surrealist period, when everything became somewhat mannered. With regard to nonsense and the proclamation of words that make no sense, people also thought about language itself.

William Kentridge. Doppel-Dada. Reflections of the eternally yesterday in the now. A conversation with Heinz-Norbert Jocks, in: Kunstforum International, Volume 243, page 180.

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William Kentridge, *Five Heads for Zurich*, 1916, 2025, each two-colour lithograph with collage
Each approx. 26.4 × 21.5 × 15.2 cm, edition of 35 copies + 4 AP, signed and numbered

The edition *Five Heads for Zurich*, 1916 is a five-part series of sculptural prints. These three-dimensional lithographs portray five personalities who were in Zurich in 1916: the Dadaists Tristan Tzara, Emmy Hennings and Hugo Ball, the writer James Joyce, and Vladimir Lenin. Kentridge himself once played Tristan Tzara in Tom Stoppard's play "*Travesties*", which is also set in Zurich in 1916. Dada and the limits of language are a recurring artistic theme for him.

William Kentridge (born 1955 in Johannesburg) is one of the most important and established contemporary artists worldwide. He works in the media of drawing, literature, film, performance, music, theatre and cross-media concepts. His work is rooted in politics, science, literature and history, and always leaves room for contradiction and uncertainty. Since the 1980s, his work has dealt with the political and social realities of his native South Africa – from apartheid to the aftermath of colonial structures. His works combine personal narratives with global themes and open up a space for resonance that links the past and the present.

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