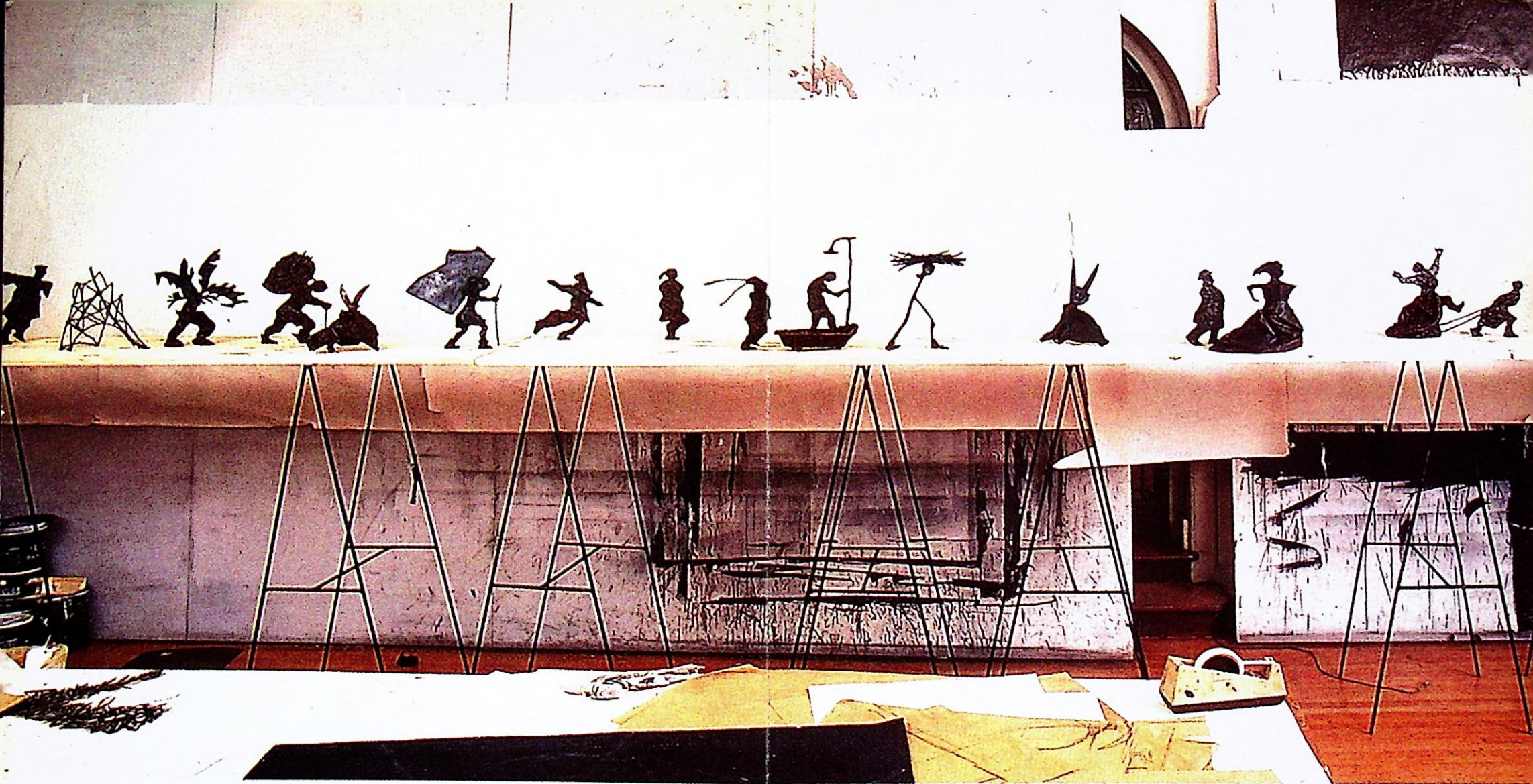


WILLIAM KENTRIDGE
RETROSPECTIVE
JOHANNESBURG ART GALLERY 2005



The drawings, films, videos and sculptures of William Kentridge (born in 1955, Johannesburg) address the nature of emotions and memory, as well as the relationship between desire, ethics and responsibility. His visual poetry also provides a vicious satirical commentary on societies, while proposing a way of seeing life as a continuous process of change rather than as a controlled world of fact.

During the 1990s, he gained international recognition for his animated short films and for the charcoal drawings based on 'erasure' that he makes in order to produce them. He has also worked in theatre for many years, initially as set designer and actor and later as director.

This retrospective exhibition is his first in Johannesburg. Initially curated by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev for the Castello di Rivoli in Turin in early 2004, it later travelled to Düsseldorf, Sydney and Montreal. After Johannesburg it will move on to Miami. A survey of Kentridge's oeuvre, it presents drawings by the artist dating back to 1979, etchings and sculptures, major early animated films and a selection of projections onto objects and furniture. Recent works demonstrate the artist's interest in shadows as metaphor for indirect vision and knowledge. Works belonging to the artist, such as prints by William Hogarth, Francisco Goya and Dumile Feni are also included.

Dark greys and black and white characterize Kentridge's tonal field. The sombre, claustrophobic visions suggest a binary structure typical of his art, where characters are torn between interior journeys and their social and moral responsibilities. This publication shows a selection of key works from the exhibition.

William Kentridge during rehearsals for *Woyzeck on the Highveld*. 1992. photo by Brigitte Enguehard, courtesy of the artist
Procession. 2000, bronze figures, studio view, collection of the artist

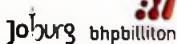
William Kentridge was born and educated in Johannesburg, graduating from the University of the Witwatersrand in 1976. The city has had a profound influence on his artmaking, in some cases serving as direct inspiration for characters or themes, and consistently present as the ground and context for all his work. The Kentridge Retrospective Exhibition at the Johannesburg Art Gallery is the first to bring a substantial body of the artist's work back to the city of its roots.

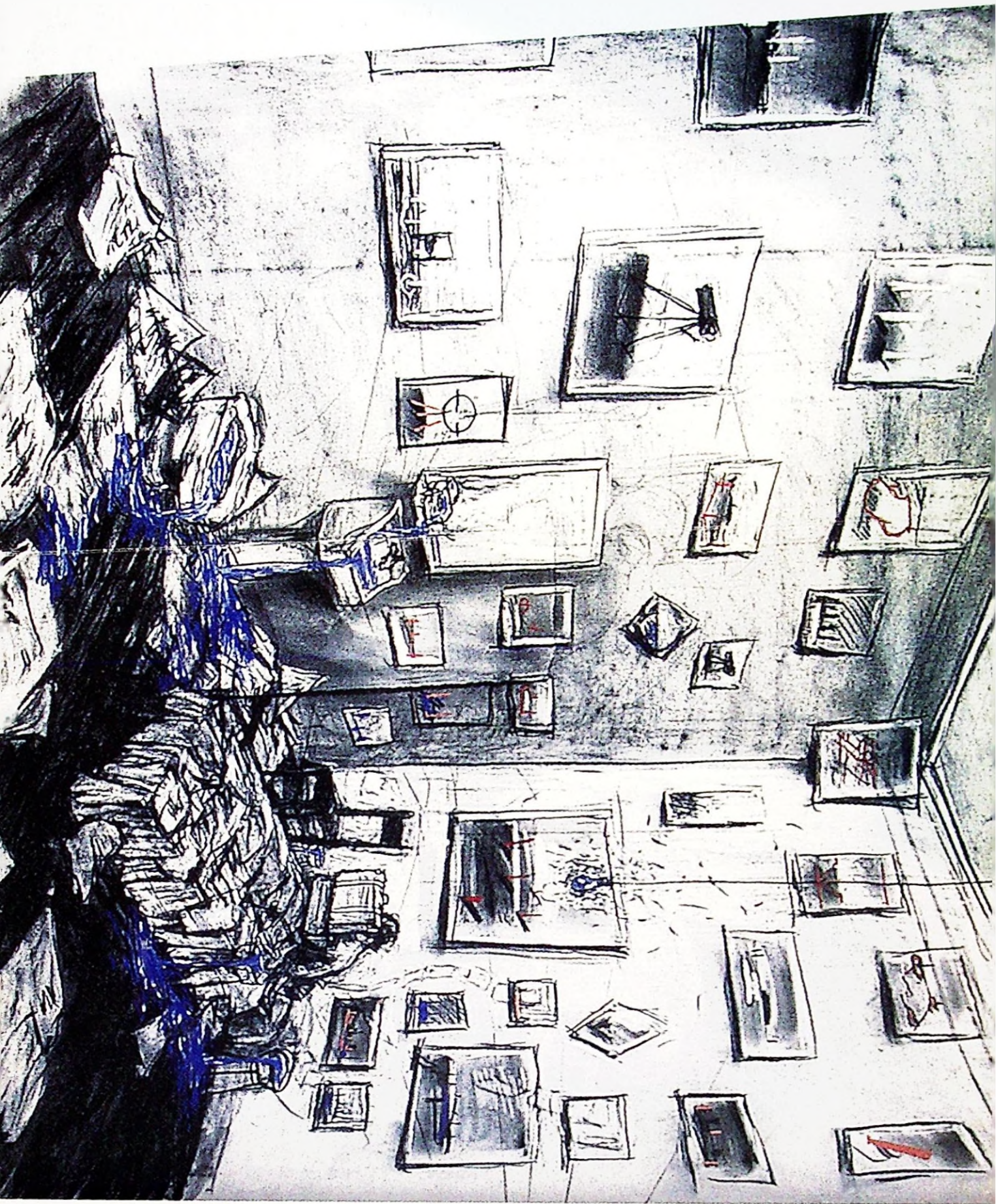
I have never been able to escape Johannesburg and in the end all my work is rooted in this rather desperate provincial city. I have never tried to make illustrations of apartheid, but the drawings and films are certainly spawned by, and feed off, the brutalised society left in its wake.

William Kentridge

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One of Kentridge's most substantial bodies of work is the series of nine Soho Eckstein animated films made between 1989 and 2003. Two of these – *Felix in Exile* (1994) and *Tide Table* (2003) – are on exhibition. The remaining seven are screened in the gallery auditorium.

Felix in Exile is the fifth in this series – also called *Drawings for Projection* – which explores the characters Soho Eckstein and Felix Teitlebaum. It was made shortly after the elections marking the end of apartheid. Here, Felix is naked and alone in a hotel room. His suitcase contains drawings made by an African woman who uses surveying tools to measure and record evidence of violence. Felix cannot directly 'see' the landscape, the marches of protesters or the dying bodies. He sees only her drawings and, through her eyes, is granted an oblique vision of the African massacre.

←← Drawing for **Felix in Exile (Malevic Room)**, 1994, collection of BHP Billiton South Africa Ltd., courtesy of the Goodman Gallery

In *Tide Table*, Kentridge returns to charcoal, pastel drawings and the character Soho Eckstein. In the film, Soho is a bystander who witnesses a number of events unfold. The power – the generals stand in separate booths, each looking outward through binoculars – is control over the seaside through vision and height. Yet it is a powerless form of control: the generals stand, watch and do nothing. Soho falls asleep, unaware of the visual reference to Africa's AIDS tragedy. Here, water is no longer the expression of passion; the white frothy waves are both the stage of events and their erasure. They lull Soho and the viewer into a sad acceptance of time passing. Later, Soho's view through binoculars represents the empowered and detached gaze of the privileged.

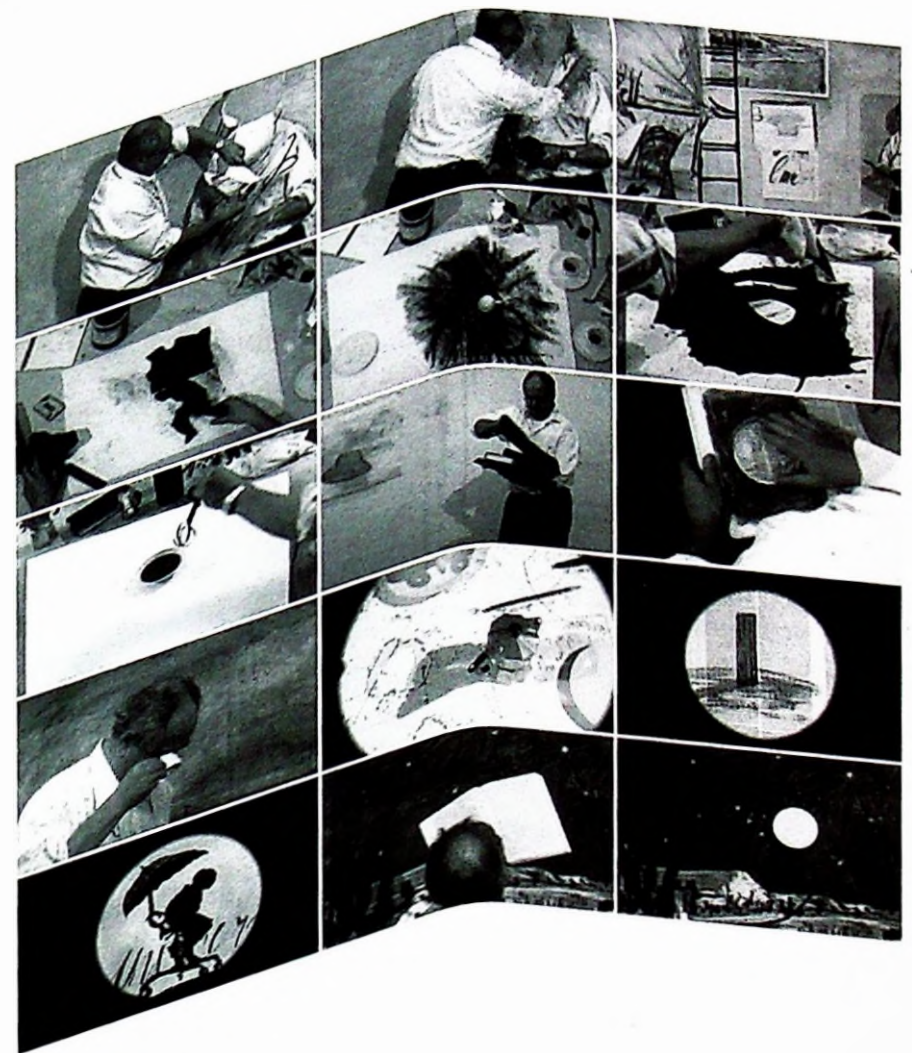
In the animated film *Zeno Writing* (2002) Kentridge brings together drawings, documentary footage from World War I and cigarette smoke. This smoke, along with that caused by military explosions, expresses how personal issues mix with broader social and political questions, and also how the personal and the public are intertwined in consciousness. This echoes Kentridge's scepticism regarding rational thinking. His belief in uncertainty as a source of knowledge is reflected in these works through smoky imagery, oblique gazes and shadow-vision.



- Drawing for *Tide Table*, 2003, collection of the artist
- Detail of drawing for *Tide Table*, 2003, collection of the artist
- Photogravure from the series *Zeno II*, 2002, collection of the artist

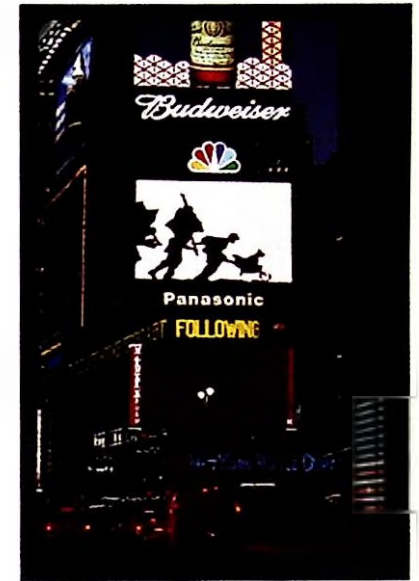


7 Fragments for Georges Méliès, Journey to the Moon and Day for Night are homages to Georges Méliès, the French filmmaker, actor and producer who experimented with the magical possibilities of early film technology. Substitutions, changes of scale and other effects enabled Méliès to achieve impossible feats, such as fitting an apartment into a suitcase. Pushing the boundaries of questions about the artist's agency, Kentridge created Day for Night, usually projected together with the Méliès fragments. Made by filming ants crawling over paper onto which the artist had 'drawn' by pouring sugar, the film was later reversed during negative development. In this way, Kentridge creates night from day.



The four bronze figures of *Shadow Quartet* are composed of blatantly mismatched parts. Large and looming, the figures change shape as the viewer rotates around them. For example, through an angle of 90 degrees the elegantly attired Edwardian silhouettes recast themselves as improbable and evocative fictions of mesh and filigree. They become puppets ingeniously engineered to read as a particular figure from one angle, and an entirely different figure from another. These figures found their origin in Kentridge's theatre production, *Confessions of Zeno*.

In early 1999 Kentridge projected an animation onto the façade of a museum in Barcelona. Here, scissors, compasses, coffee pots and paper figures became a nocturnal procession, a visual metaphor of political marches. A longer version – *Shadow Procession* (1999) – was premiered at the Istanbul Biennial later in 1999. An enormous Ubu with oversized hands and a bloated belly cracks his whip madly. Following him is a procession of emaciated shadow figures shuffling across the screen. As the figures rise up, their slow, painful walk becomes a festive march. The sound for the film was generated from recordings of South Africa political rallies in the 1990s.



- > Detail of *Shadow Quartet*. 2004
- > *Shadow Procession*. 1999, installation, Times Square, New York, 2001