

YSP

Press Release

William Kentridge: The Pull of Gravity

28 June 2025 – 19 April 2026

Underground Gallery and Outdoors

Yorkshire Sculpture Park (YSP) presents a new landmark exhibition by the celebrated South African artist, William Kentridge (b.1955). *The Pull of Gravity* marks the first museum presentation outside South Africa to focus on his sculpture and has been a decade in the making.



William Kentridge in his studio working on the preparatory plaster version of the monumental bronze *Laocoön*, Johannesburg, 2021. Photo: Stella Olivier, © William Kentridge

Bringing together over 40 works made between 2007 and 2024, this significant project is a carefully choreographed and multi-sensory journey into Kentridge's world. *Paper Procession*, displayed outdoors, is a commission created for YSP of six monumental, colourful sculptures that parade in front of a century-old yew hedge. Joining this new work are four of the artist's largest bronzes to date, displayed against far-reaching views over the Yorkshire landscape.

The Pull of Gravity presents an extensive body of sculpture across a range of scales and materials, including bronze, steel, aluminium, paper, cardboard, plaster, wood, and found objects. In addition, the exhibition features the first institutional presentation of *Self-Portrait as a Coffee Pot* (2020-24). This series of short films was embarked upon during the first Covid-19 lockdown and allows audiences an intimate insight into the life of Kentridge's studio, the workings of his mind, and the energy and agency of making. In the central gallery space, two films – *More Sweetly Play the Dance* (2015) and *Oh To Believe In Another World* (2022) – are shown in rotation in an immersive installation across seven screens. They span over 20 metres and wrap around the viewers, surrounding them with music and movement.

Kentridge is known for working across media, including drawing, sculpture, tapestry, animated films, theatre, and opera productions. He has lived in Johannesburg throughout his life and his practice is indelibly connected to the socio-political history of South Africa. From a standpoint that rejects certainty, he questions grand narratives from history, politics, science, literature and music, alongside an ongoing interrogation of the legacy of colonialism.



William Kentridge, Still from *Self-Portrait as a Coffee-Pot*, 2022. Courtesy Kentridge Studio, © William Kentridge

Clare Lilley said: “*Yorkshire Sculpture Park has had a long-held ambition to work with William Kentridge and for more than a decade we have had conversations about sculpture. It is with a profound sense of joy to now present a substantial and representative body of Kentridge’s sculptural work. The artist has created a new series of monumental painted aluminium and steel sculptures which are joined by large bronzes in the stunning Yorkshire landscape. This ambitious exhibition will be a whirlwind of sound and image where the personal and political, the rhapsodic and ordinary, and the seemingly insignificant and socially imperative collide, creating a potent, dynamic world.*”

Although tackling pressing and difficult subjects, Kentridge does so with openness and curiosity around the human condition. The artist makes works that are acerbic and challenging, yet they embrace the enduring possibility of hope and abound with poeticism and beauty. These ideas are often explored using metaphors of darkness and light, lightness and weight – all considerations that are vital to his sculpture.

Over the last two decades, sculpture has increasingly become a key part of Kentridge's practice, taking drawing into three dimensions and developing from puppetry, film and stage props. The inextricable relationship between drawing and sculpture in his work is at the heart of *The Pull of Gravity*. His sculptures delve into how the essence of form is constructed, perceived and understood, testing the boundaries of the medium and its potential to embody ideas and question ways of seeing.

Kentridge writes: “*I never thought of myself as a sculptor, but I had worked a lot with shadows in performance and in drawings and I was interested in the possibility of making something like a shadow – so ephemeral and without any substance – to be solid.*”

Kentridge's engagement with the history of sculpture-making can be seen in works that reference wide-ranging sources of inspiration, from Picasso's bronze *The She Goat* (1950) to the ancient figure of Laocoön (27 BC–68 AD). Kentridge's own *Laocoön (Plaster)* (2021) has interlaced and arcing forms that echo the energy and movement of its ancient namesake. Bringing the relationship between three-dimensional and two-dimensional forms into focus are large drawings on the gallery walls that mirror the shapes of the sculpture and which explore the connected concepts of positive and negative, darkness and light, shadows and silhouettes.

Running throughout the exhibition, from table-top to monumental scale, is a family of bronzes known as *Glyph* that demonstrates Kentridge's distinctive sculptural language and process. Depicting objects from domestic or studio life – such as a typewriter, coffee pot, and scissors – together with animals, birds and figures, these symbols repeat across his work. Each *Glyph* begins its life as a two-dimensional ink drawing or paper cut-out. This outline is then traced onto cardboard, carefully removed and built into a three-dimensional form using foamcore and wax to add volume and refine its form, before being cast in bronze. In reference to both ink and shadows, the bronzes all have a black patina. This is a process of bringing an object into existence, adding weight and heft, and one that resonates with the exhibition's title, *The Pull of Gravity*.

Kentridge's sculptures will also be sited outdoors in YSP's historic landscape, including at the top of the sloping Bothy Garden where large-scale bronzes process powerfully against the backdrop of a curving early 19th-century brick wall. Over three and a half metres in height, these *Glyph* works include a striding figure with megaphone head, an ampersand, and a stretching cat. The six towering and dynamic forms of the significant new commission *Paper Procession* (2024) stand up to five metres high and their bold tones of red, yellow and orange sing against the dark yew hedge beyond. They were initially created using hand-torn pieces of paper from a cash book and assembled to evoke semi-abstract figures in movement; they retain the form of the original 30cm high versions displayed inside the gallery.

William Kentridge said: *"I am delighted to be having an exhibition at Yorkshire Sculpture Park this year. It is a place with a great history and I am pleased to be in the company of the exceptional artists who have shown there over the years. This exhibition shows the transition of the drawn silhouette or shadow to sculpture and that sculpture is a form of drawing."*

Further works engage with historic sculptural modes and movements. Kentridge subverts the loaded tradition of equestrian sculpture in a series of seven bronze horse sculptures which form part of the body of work made for his production of *The Nose* (2010). He writes: *"there is a history of self-glorification, in the historical parade of equestrian statues... I wanted to see if I could make an anti-heroic equestrian statue, a horse least worthy of being on a plinth."* Fragmenting solid form and moving away from a complete, monolithic statement, Kentridge assembled his horses from pieces of cardboard, clamps, twigs, rulers, and other *"debris lying around the studio"*. Even through the process of then being cast into bronze, these sculptures retain their sense of anti-monumentality, precarity, and absurdity.

The artist's kinship with early 20th-century avant-garde movements such as Dada and Surrealism also manifests across his practice in his celebration of the illogical and darkly humorous. Connecting to artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Alexander Calder, and Jean Tinguely, the kinetic work *Singer Trio* (2019) features three sewing machines with megaphones that sound out vocals by South African singer and choreographer Nhlamhla Mahlangu and welcome audiences into the gallery. It is joined by *Semaphore* (2011) and *Bicycle Wheel III (double megaphone)* (2012).

In addition to sculpture, a selection of films, tapestry, and drawings are brought together in an exhibition designed by one of Kentridge's long-term collaborators, Sabine Theunissen. In the large central gallery, two films create a truly absorbing experience, shown on seven large screens that fill the space. The iconic *More Sweetly Play the Dance* (2015) is a caravan of figures in silhouette, including a brass band, animated skeletons, and figures that references the migration of refugees, the West African Ebola outbreak and so on, accompanied by haunting music.



William Kentridge, *Paper Procession (Palermo Cash Book) I*, 2023. Photo: Thys Dullaart, © William Kentridge

Oh To Believe in Another World (2022) explores composer Dmitri Shostakovich's troubled relationship with Stalin through the lens of his Symphony No.10, which anticipated and could only be released after the despotic leader's death. It speaks of the role of artists as agents of opposition and finding freedom in the face of totalitarian regimes.

Visitors will be able to engage with a programme of activities at YSP, drawing on themes in Kentridge's work. A catalogue featuring a newly commissioned essay by Tamar Garb and in-situ photography will be published to coincide with the exhibition and will be for sale online and in the YSP shop.

The exhibition is made possible through the generosity of the Sakana Foundation, Goodman Gallery, Hauser & Wirth, and Lia Rumma Gallery. Supported by the kind philanthropy of the William Kentridge Exhibition Circle. Logistics partner: Crozier Fine Arts. Additional support: Stonehage Fleming.

William Kentridge Exhibition Circle:

Anonymous Supporters; The Bukhman Foundation; Meena Chugani; Werner Dubach and Ruth Müller-Stein; E-Len and David Fu; Jill Hackel and Andrzej Zarzycki; and Scheherazade Collection.

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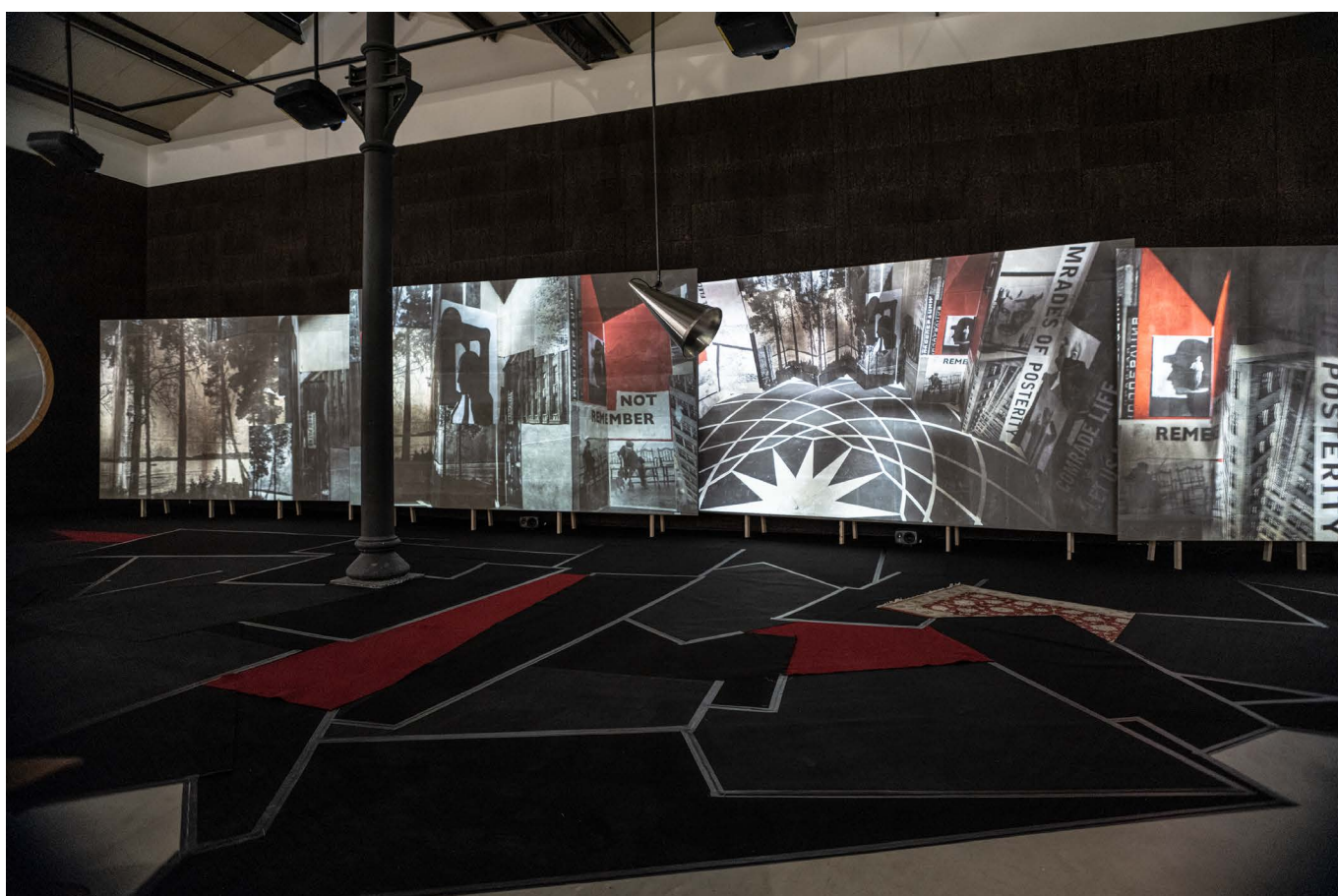
William Kentridge, *Singer Trio*, 2019. Photo: Thys Dullaart, © William Kentridge



William Kentridge, *Cursive*, 2020. Photo: Thys Dullaart, © William Kentridge



William Kentridge, *Untitled VI (Nose on Horse: Napoleon)*, 2007. Photo © William Kentridge



William Kentridge, *More Sweetly Play the Dance*, 2015 (above) and *Oh To Believe In Another World*, 2022 (below), at LUMA Foundation, Arles. Photos: Vicor & Simon – Joana Luz, © William Kentridge

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About William Kentridge

William Kentridge (born Johannesburg, South Africa in 1955) is internationally renowned for his multidisciplinary art that integrates drawing, film, performance, theatre, opera, and music. His works explore themes of politics, science, literature, and history, while maintaining an openness to contradiction and uncertainty.

Since the 1990s, Kentridge's art has been exhibited in prestigious museums globally, including MoMA in New York, the Louvre in Paris, and the Royal Academy of Arts in London. He has also participated a number of times in Documenta in Kassel (2012, 2002, 1997) and the Venice Biennale (2015, 2013, 2005, 1999 and 1993).

Kentridge's opera productions, including Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, Shostakovich's *The Nose* and Alban Berg's operas *Lulu* and *Wozzeck*, have been performed at renowned venues such as the Metropolitan Opera in New York, La Scala in Milan and English National Opera in London. His theatrical works, like *Refuse the Hour* and *The Head & the Load*, have also been staged worldwide. Additionally, Kentridge has collaborated with the Handspring Puppet Company on productions like *Ubu & the Truth Commission* and *Faustus in Africa!*.

Kentridge's achievements have earned him numerous honours, including honorary doctorates from Yale, Columbia, and London University. In 2015 he was appointed an Honorary Academician of the Royal Academy in London. His work has been recognised with prestigious awards such as the Princesa de Asturias Award for the Arts in 2017 and in 2023 the Olivier Award for outstanding Achievement in Opera for *Sibyl* in London.

In 2016, Kentridge founded the Centre for Less Good Idea in Johannesburg, fostering experimental, collaborative art practices. His works are housed in prominent collections globally, from the Centre Pompidou in Paris to the National Gallery of Australia.

About Yorkshire Sculpture Park

Awarded VisitEngland's gold accolade in 2023-24 for an outstanding visitor attraction, Yorkshire Sculpture Park (YSP) is the leading international centre for modern and contemporary sculpture. Welcoming around 300,000 visitors each year, YSP is a registered charity and accredited museum situated in the 500-acre, 18th-century Bretton Hall estate in West and South Yorkshire.

YSP was founded in 1977 by Sir Peter Murray CBE, and it is the largest sculpture park of its kind in Europe. It is the only place in the world to see Barbara Hepworth's *The Family of Man* in its entirety, alongside a significant collection of sculpture, including bronzes by Henry Moore, important pieces by Hemali Bhuta, Roger Hiorns, Damien Hirst, Suhasini Kejrival, Kimsooja, Marc Quinn, Hank Willis Thomas and Erwin Wurm, and site-specific works by Katrina Palmer, Andy Goldsworthy, Alfredo Jaar, David Nash, Sean Scully and James Turrell. YSP mounts a year-round temporary exhibitions programme including some of the world's leading artists

across six galleries and the outdoors. Highlights include exhibitions by Ai Weiwei, Fiona Banner, Anthony Caro, Tony Cragg, Leonardo Drew, Robert Indiana, Amar Kanwar, KAWS, Bharti Kher, Kimsooja, Joan Miró, Henry Moore, Lindsey Mendick, Annie Morris, Giuseppe Penone, Jaume Plensa, Ursula von Rydingsvard, Sean Scully, Yinka Shonibare CBE, Chiharu Shiota, David Smith, Joana Vasconcelos, Bill Viola and Erwin Wurm.

Across its 48-year history, YSP has worked with over 1,000 artists from more than 40 countries, on varied projects from short-term residencies to major surveys. YSP supports artists at vital stages in their careers and is rare in having the accommodation, workshops and expertise to enable open-ended and risk-taking practice, giving artists space, time and support to think and to develop new ideas.

Over this time, YSP has sought to ignite, nurture and sustain interest in and debate around contemporary art and sculpture, especially with those for whom art participation is not habitual or familiar. It enables open access to art, situations and ideas, and continues to re-evaluate and expand the approach to considering art's role and relevance in society. Supporting 40,000 people each year through YSP's learning programme, this innovative work develops ability, confidence and life aspiration in participants.

YSP's core work is made possible by investment from Arts Council England, Wakefield Council, the Liz and Terry Bramall Foundation and Dunard Fund. YSP was named Art Fund Museum of the Year in 2014 and awarded the 2023 Visitor Attraction of the Year and Cultural Award in the Yorkshire Post Tourism Awards.

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