

Press release

William Kentridge. O Sentimental Machine

22 March to 26 August 2018

Press preview: Wednesday, 21 March 2018, 11.00 am

Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung

(Frankfurt am Main, 2 May 2018) The Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung presents a very special guest from 22 March to 26 August 2018: William Kentridge (b. 1955) brings his works into dialogue with the collection of the Frankfurt museum, which spans five thousand years. Conceived as a comprehensive exhibition showing over eighty works and installations, “William Kentridge. O Sentimental Machine” exemplifies the whole range of the South African artist’s oeuvre. Kentridge has made an international name for himself with his drawings, films, and theatre and opera productions. Already featured in solo exhibitions in the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Albertina in Vienna, and the Louvre in Paris, as well as in opera productions at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, the Scala in Milano, the Salzburg Festival, or Documenta, his production as an artist is fundamentally interdisciplinary and combines different media and genres. Staged by Sabine Theunissen and curated by Vinzenz Brinkmann and Kristin Schrader, the show extends across nearly all departments and rooms of the Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung: from its antiquities collection and medieval rooms to the *studioli* of the historicist Villa Liebieg. Visitors are invited to engage in a dialogue of art encompassing the entire museum, in which Kentridge’s conceptual, narrative, and aesthetic intentions closely interlink with the museum presentation of the Liebieghaus collection.

Next to important workgroups such as the installation *The Refusal of Time* (2012) shown at Documenta 13 for the first time, the eponymous video installation *O Sentimental Machine* (2015), or the fully automatic miniature theatre *Black Box / Chambre Noire* (2005), the show in Frankfurt includes new works by the artist, among them the bronze sculpture series *Lexicon* (2017) or, a premiere, the kinetic sculpture *Coffee Pot* (2018). William Kentridge has also made nine ink drawings—overpaintings of motifs from the Liebieghaus—to be published in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition. After “Jeff Koons. The Sculptor” (2012), “William Kentridge. O Sentimental Machine” is the second intervention of a contemporary artist in the Liebieghaus collection.

The exhibition has been made possible by Art Mentor Foundation Lucerne and Kulturfonds Frankfurt RheinMain gGmbH.

‘It is a great gain to have William Kentridge as our guest. His works unfold a unique dialogue with the religious, ethical and political concepts of art from antiquity to the nineteenth century within the presentation of our holdings. Bringing together our collection and its rooms with the whole range of this versatile artist’s creative work makes for a very special atmosphere. All senses are arrested in the best possible way’, says Philipp Demandt, Director of the Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung.

The exhibition focuses on the artist’s fundamental interest in the phenomenon of movement and its material-mechanic and optical-illusionist generation. Ranging from automatic theatres, which were already in great demand in the ancient world, to Renaissance anamorphoses and the nineteenth-century precursors of cinematographic apparatuses, the techniques Kentridge falls back on forge a bridge across a long span of time. All this finds its reflection in charcoal drawings, sculptural works, objects, and films marked by the random, quick and makeshift tenor so typical of the artist. The nineteenth-century constitutes a second exhibition focus: it offers itself to the development of issues concerning the inhuman definition of time and work in the era of industrialisation—issues that have pervaded William Kentridge’s political work from its very beginnings. At the same time, particularly the artist’s more recent installations that recall the concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in their concatenation of different artistic means of expression enter into a fascinating relationship with the architecture of Heinrich von Liebieg’s villa and the opulent Historicism of the late nineteenth century it reflects.

‘The collaboration with William Kentridge and his team has been extraordinarily creative and amicable from the first moment. Kentridge is a political artist and historiographer who quite naturally stands his ground in the double context of the Liebieghaus, i.e., the history of the house and the history of the collection. He explores movement and automation—which European antiquity, for example Aristotle, were already concerned with—as well as the failure of modern bourgeois ideals’, comments Vinzenz Brinkmann, curator of the exhibition and head of the antiquities department of the Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung.

The Exhibition: a Dialogue in Art Across the Entire Museum

The construction of the Liebieghaus on the bank of the Main in Frankfurt was completed in 1896. The late historicist building constitutes a three-dimensional encyclopaedia of European art styles; eighty sculptures decorate the façades of the house. The Liebieg family had come into great wealth through the industrial revolution of the textile sector as well as through its large workforce and the purchase of raw materials at a reasonable price. Both the villa and the park were offered to the authorities of the city of Frankfurt for sale—provided that a museum would be established there. At the beginning of the twentieth century, this museum was conceived as a collection that, based on important masterpieces, would tell the history of sculpture from a bourgeois European perspective. Now, in 2018, the Liebieghaus provides a unique stage for the exhibition “William Kentridge. O Sentimental Machine”. Extending across a total of

twenty-seven rooms, the presentation already starts on the way to the foyer of the sculpture collection, where torn paper motifs from William Kentridge's series of originally steel-cut sculptures *Processione di Riparazioniste* (2017) can be seen. While the cogwheel in the tympanum field of the Villa Liebieg's main portal pays homage to industrial labour, which laid the foundations for the Liebieg family's economic success, Kentridge's *Riparazioniste* celebrate all those without whose unpaid or underpaid work Europe's prosperity would never have come about. The rotunda of the Liebieghaus, for example, awaits visitors with a further confrontation that puts the ancient sculptor Myron's Athena opposite the crucial prop of the installation *The Refusal of Time*. This installation presented in the hall dedicated to Roman art in its entirety criticizes the technical concept of time: the pumping movements of the wooden 'breathing machine' in its centre recall the nineteenth-century Paris time pump that could send acoustic signals to administrative authorities, schools, and railway stations in precise intervals by means of a complex system of tubes. Several busts, Kentridge's *Roman Heads* and *Polychrome Heads*, are to be found in the portrait gallery of the Liebieghaus. Many of them are characterized by a formal diversion: though cast in bronze, they successfully evoke the impression of transient materials like cardboard, adhesive tape, or newsprint. The artist reflects on the phenomenon of ancient statues' polychromy—that is also a research focus of the Liebieghaus. The museum's large hall of medieval art confronts visitors with the—sometimes parodic—video installation *O Sentimental Machine*. Developed on the occasion of the Istanbul Biennial in 2015, the work focuses on Leo Trotzki's working relationship with his secretary Evgenia Shelepina, yet also relates to his theories of man's machine-like character. The installation copies the foyer in form of a proscenium stage that is to be accessed and thus transforms the public into participants of a re-enactment of the exhibition context of 2015. In Frankfurt, *O Sentimental Machine* will be framed by the medieval, almost life-size figures of a Lamentation group and a Mount of Olives group, whose scenic presentation was to enable believers to feel part of the event. Another highlight of the exhibition is *Black Box / Chambre Noire*, a fully automatic miniature theatre that brings all the artist's perspectives together and is shown in the large rococo salon of Mr. and Mrs. Liebieg. This work testifies to William Kentridge's profoundly political stance by shedding light on the European bourgeois society's failure. *Black Box / Chambre Noire* also brings up Ancient Greece and its examination of movement in time and space, especially the history of the automaton, which occupied the Greek mind and already featured as a reference system in Aristotle's treatise on the motion of animals.

Structured as a handbook, the publication accompanying the exhibition comprises both essayistic texts and comments on all rooms and the dialogues of the major exhibition unfolding in them. It will be published by Kerber Verlag under the title *O Sentimental Machine* (eds. Vinzenz Brinkmann and Kristin Schrader).

A Short Biography of the Artist

Born in Johannesburg in 1955, William Kentridge is internationally known for his drawings, films, theatre and opera productions. He was born into a Jewish family of lawyers who pleaded the cause of black people in South Africa's Apartheid trials. His mother, Felicia Kentridge, was one of the founders of the Legal Resources Centre; his father, Sydney Kentridge, defended Nelson Mandela in the Treason Trial, for instance. Kentridge's artistic approach is interdisciplinary, bringing together different media and genres. His works explore the consequences of colonialism and the apartheid regime; often black-and-white, they also refer to the history of film—from stop-motion animations to early special effects. Characteristic in their processual style and dynamics of erasing and repeated overpainting, drawings constitute an essential part of the filmmaker's comprehensive production.

Kentridge has shown his work all over the world since the 1990s, among other venues at the Documenta in Kassel, in the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Albertina in Vienna, the Musée du Louvre in Paris, the Whitechapel Gallery in London, the Louisiana Museum in Copenhagen, and the Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid. His opera productions were presented at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, the Scala in Milan, the English National Opera in London, the Opéra de Lyon, at the Salzburg Festival, and in other contexts. He has been awarded numerous prizes, such as the Goslar Kaiserring (2003), the Kyoto Prize (2010), and the Premio Princesa de Asturias (2017). In 2012, Kentridge presented the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard University and was made a member of the American Philosophical Society and the American Academy of Arts & Sciences. In 2013, he received an Honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts from Yale University. Kentridge has been known to the Frankfurt public since 2005. He was the first artist to hold the Max Beckmann Professorship at the Städelschule that year.

The Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung

Presenting more than 3,000 works on 1,600 square metres, the Liebieghaus ranks among the internationally most renowned sculpture museums. The manifold collection comprises sculptures from Ancient Egypt to Neoclassicism: with its works of Egyptian, Greek and Roman antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, Mannerism, the Baroque, the Rococo, Neoclassicism and Eastern Asia, it offers a substantial survey of five thousand years of sculpture. In addition to the permanent presentation and its departments *Antiquity*, *Middle Ages*, *Renaissance to Neoclassicism*, the *studioli* in the attic and the Open Depot offer an opportunity for unusual comparisons of works in the most diverse formats, of different materials and periods of origin. Between 1892 and 1896, the Munich architect Leonhard Romeis (1854–1904) realized one of the Gründerzeit period's most beautiful and splendid private buildings for the textile manufacturer Heinrich Baron von Liebieg (1839–1904). Romeis's solution unites elements of various European building styles, for example the South Tyrolean and the Bamberg Renaissance. Decorated with stucco and wooden ceilings, wainscoting, custom-made furniture and artworks, the villa's interior also features a wide spectrum of styles.

William Kentridge. *O Sentimental Machine*

Exhibition dates: 22 March to 26 August 2018

Press preview: Wednesday, 21 March 2018, 11.00 am

Curators: Prof. Dr. Vinzenz Brinkmann (head of the *Antiquities* and *Asia* departments of the Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung), Kristin Schrader (Assistant Curator)

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Location: Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung, Schaumainkai 71, 60596 Frankfurt am Main

Opening hours: Tue, Wed, Fri–Sun 10.00 am–6.00 pm, Thur 10.00 am–9.00 pm, closed on Mondays

Special opening hours: 30 March, 2 April, 1 May, 10 May, 21 May, 31 May 10.00 am–6.00 pm.

Admission: 12 euros, reduced 10 euros, family ticket 20 euros, free admission for children under twelve years of age

Advance booking: tickets.liebieghaus.de

Catalogue: The handbook *O Sentimental Machine* accompanying the exhibition will be published by Kerber Verlag. Edited by Vinzenz Brinkmann and Kristin Schrader, it will comprise a preface by Philipp Demandt and contributions by Vinzenz Brinkmann, Oliver Primavesi, William Kentridge, Michaela Ott, and Kristin Schrader, German and English, 288 pages, 39.90 euros (museum edition).

Programme: A comprehensive programme will accompany the exhibition. It will be launched with a lecture by William Kentridge on his presently developed performance “The Head & the Load” in the Städel Museum on March 22. The performance will premiere in London’s Tate Modern this summer and then be presented in New York. A limited number of tickets is available only under tickets.liebieghaus.de.

For the complete programme, see www.liebieghaus.de.

Social Media: The Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung communicates the exhibition in the social media with the hashtags #Kentridge and #Liebieghaus.

Digitorial: A multimedia digitorial offering the best possible preparation for the exhibition will be available under kentridge.liebieghaus.de as of 14 March.

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