THE HEAD&THE LOAD

WILLIAM KENTRIDGE



PHILIP MILLER
THUTHUKA SIBISI
GREGORY MAQOMA


“Like everyone else there
I was utterly engrossed and
fabulously transported.”
★★★★★
– THE TELEGRAPH LONDON
“William Kentridge’s piece about WW1 is electrifying.”
– THE INDEPENDENT LONDON



“No one really knows how many Africans perished but it was in the hundreds of thousands. Kentridge et al have created a masterpiece to mark this shaming tragedy.” ★★★★★

– THE EVENING STANDARD LONDON





“The Head & the Load is about Africa and Africans in the First World War, that is to say about all the contradictions and paradoxes of colonialism that were heated and compressed by circumstances of the war. It is about historical incomprehension (and inaudibility and invisibility). The colonial logic towards the black participants could be summed up.

‘Lest their actions merit recognition, their deeds must not be recorded.’

The Head & the Load aims to recognize and record.”

WILLIAM KENTRIDGE











William Kentridge's exploration of Africa's role in the First World War combines music, dance, film projections, mechanized sculptures and shadow play to illuminate the untold story of the millions of African porters and carriers who served—and in many cases died for—British, French and German battlefield forces. Freighted with the weight of this little-examined history and quickened by Kentridge's visionary theatrical alchemy, *The Head & the Load* is an exceptionally ambitious work of performance.

A play on the Ghanaian proverb, "the head and the load are the troubles of the neck," the large-scale work speaks to the experience of the nearly two million African porters and carriers used by the British, French, and Germans who bore the brunt of the casualties during the First World War in Africa. The historical significance of their crucial role in the conflict has remained largely unexamined for a century.

The Head & the Load sees Kentridge work with his long-time collaborator **Philip Miller**, one of South Africa's leading composers along with **Thuthuka Sibisi** co-composer/ music director and choreographer and principle dancer **Gregory Maqoma** to create what the artist describes as "an interrupted musical procession". This rich and multi-layered performance features an international cast of singers, dancers, and performers, a majority directly from South Africa. Miller's score was originally performed by the ever-adventurous New York-based chamber orchestra, The Knights who are joined by musicians from Italy, South Africa and Guinea. Miller's powerful and evocative compositions offer a perfect complement to Kentridge's imaginative work.

CREATIVE NOTES

PHILIP MILLER + THUTHUKA SIBISI

During the First World War, the English Committee for the Welfare of Africans sent hymn books, harmonicas, gramophones and banjos to the African battalions so that they could entertain themselves. What songs of war, love and longing might have been made by these African men in the trenches on the Western Front or in the camps of East Africa?

In the early twentieth century, composers such as Hindemith, Schoenberg and Ravel sounded the siren for the end of Romanticism and the beginning of a new modernism. From this arose a musical shift toward atonality and serialism. Is it possible that the Swahili phrase books and dictionaries published for the colonial commanders were as absurdist to the ear of a Kenyan soldier as the nonsense poetry of Kurt Schwitters?

The sounds of war are violent and unpredictable. This was the sonic reality of every soldier, porter and civilian caught up in the war, in Europe and Africa. Using collage as a tool we move from a cabaret song by Schoenberg, intercut with percussive slaps on hymn books, to a Viennese waltz by Fritz Kreisler. Amidst this tension and instability, Africa talks back to Europe through rhythmic war songs and chants, deliberately resisting the raucous musical soundscapes of the European avant-garde.

What did the Great War sound like to the African soldiers and carriers who fought in it? Their experiences were not considered significant enough to be recorded or archived. We can only imagine the noises they heard or the music they made, through the multitude of voices and sounds we have created in The Head & the Load.

WILLIAM KENTRIDGE

Every project has to be a coming together of two things: an intriguing thematic idea, and a material form through which to think about it. In this case, our thinking is embodied in projections on a screen, the words of performers, music that is played, the movement of bodies.

The test is really to find an approach that is not an analytic dissection of a historical moment, but which doesn't avoid the questions of history. Can one find the truth in the fragmented and incomplete? Can one think about history as collage, rather than as narrative?

We are aided in the history itself. If you're thinking of the war in Europe, you're thinking about high modernism. The Dada movement of 1916 is an essential part of the project. One of the striking aspects of colonialism is Europe's incomprehension of Africa – not being able to hear the very clear language that was being spoken by Africa to Europe. There is the sense of language breaking down into nonsense, which is what Dadaism was very much about.

Carrying through the idea of history as collage, the libretto of The Head & the Load is largely constructed from texts and phrases from a range of writers and sources, cut-up, interleaved and expanded. Frantz Fanon translated into siSwati; Tristan Tzara in isiZulu; Wilfred Owen in French and dog-barking; the conference of Berlin, which divided up Africa, rendered as sections from Kurt Schwitters's Ursonate; phrases from a handbook of military drills; Setswana proverbs from Sol Plaatje's 1920 collection; some lines from Aimé Césaire.









The Head & The Load was co-commissioned by 14-18 NOW: WW1 Centenary Commissions, Park Avenue Armory, Ruhrtriennale and MASS MoCA with additional support from Holland Festival.

Lead support for the development of The Head & the Load has been provided by Brenda R. Potter, Daniel R. Lewis, the W.L.S. Spencer Foundation and Jennifer & Jonathan Allan Soros, with further support from Alessia Bulgari, Agnes Gund and Wendy Fisher. Additional support has been provided by the JKW Foundation, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Simeon Bruner, Sarah McNair, Randal Fippinger, John and Cynthia Reed, Bill & Sako Fisher, Quaternaire and donors who wish to remain anonymous.

Developed at MASS MoCA, North Adams, 2018, and Kentridge Studios, Johannesburg 2017-2018. World premiere in London at Tate Modern, produced by THE OFFICE performing arts + film in association with Quaternaire. 14-18 NOW was supported by the National Lottery through Arts Council England & Heritage Lottery Fund and by the Department of Digital Culture Media and Sport.

The Head & The Load acknowledges the kind assistance of Marian Goodman Gallery, Goodman Gallery and Lia Rumma Gallery in this project.

CREATIVE TEAM



CONCEPT AND DIRECTOR	William Kentridge
COMPOSER	Philip Miller
CO-COMPOSER MUSIC DIRECTOR	Thuthuka Sibisi
PROJECTION DESIGN	Catherine Meyburgh
CHOREOGRAPHY	Gregory Maqoma
COSTUME DESIGN	Greta Goiris
SET DESIGN	Sabine Theunissen
LIGHTING DESIGN	Urs Schönebaum
SOUND DESIGN	Mark Grey
VIDEO EDITING COMPOSITING	Janus Fouché Žana Marović | Catherine Meyburgh
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR	Luc De Wit
STUDIO TECHNICAL DIRECTOR	Chris Waldo de Wet

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

theheadandtheload.com



STAGING

The staging of The Head & the Load can only be achieved in very large non-traditional theater spaces of great height and of greater width than depth—for example at the Armory in NYC using the Drill Hall sideways to create a stage 55m wide and a surface for projection of that width and 15m height or the expanse of the Turbine Hall at the TATE MODERN. The entire cast performs across this width, with a backdrop of both projected images and thrown shadows. There is a dynamic play of perspective between the performers, the projections and shadow and the audience, as elements of the presentation move across and up and down the stage, providing intimate moments amidst the vast stage. Three large-scale projectors provide both the images and the light source for the shadows; the projection surface is hand painted vintage tarps and army surplus tents.

KEY PRODUCTION ELEMENTS

This large-scale performance piece can only exist outside the bounds of a conventional theater, features a moving orchestra and chorus, multiple film projections, and shadow play. The staging is at once complex but spare with only a large ladder, giant ear listening devices, a megaphone and moving crates as props. The international cast of 38 people moving continually across the space featuring actors, dancers and performers. Musically, it includes a roving chamber orchestra, a South African chorus and featured performers including soloists, a pianist, viola player and a kora conducted by music director, Thuthuka Sibisi.

The performance is for a seated audience of 600-1500.
The performance usually travels with a company of 57 members providing the support to stage this unique production.

Duration is 85 minutes no intermission.

William Kentridge [born Johannesburg, South Africa, 1955] is internationally acclaimed for his drawings, films, theatre and opera productions. His practice is born out of a cross-fertilisation between mediums and genres.
His work responds to the legacies of colonialism and apartheid, within the context of South Africa's socio-political landscape. His aesthetics are drawn from the medium of film's own history, from stop-motion animation to early special effects. Kentridge's drawing, specifically the dynamism of an erased and redrawn mark, is an integral part of his expanded animation and filmmaking practice, where the meanings of his films are developed during the process of their making. Kentridge's practice also incorporates his theatre training.

His exhibitions and large-scale, staged performances draw on his interests in contemporary, classical music and opera, the exploration of time, and the forgotten histories of colonialism. With his trademark collection of shape-shifting images Kentridge references the absurdism of the Dadaists in an attempt to codify the place of politics in his work. Never one to be limited by media or genre, Kentridge makes prints, drawings, animations, sculptures, assemblages and applies them to films, theatre and opera production. As he puts it - the world is invited into his studio and then cropped up and re-arranged.

Operating on an epic scale his work has been shown and collected by museums all over the world, including Whitechapel Gallery, London, Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art, Beijing, and Museum of Modern Art, New York. Kentridge is the recipient of honorary doctorates from several universities including Yale and the University of London, and in 2012 he presented the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard University. In 2010, he received the Kyoto Prize. In 2015 he was appointed an Honorary Academician of the Royal Academy in London. In October 2017, he received the Princesa de Asturias Award for the arts.



TOUR DATES



TATE MODERN TURBINE HALL, LONDON (UK)	*World Premier*	**JULY 11-15, 2018**
RUHRTRIENNALE, DUISBURG (GE)		**AUG 9-12, 2018**
PARK AVENUE ARMORY, NEW YORK (USA)	*North American Premier*	**DEC 4-15, 2018**
HOLLAND FESTVAL, AMSTERDAM (NL)		**MAY 29–JUNE 1, 2019**



JOBURG THEATRE, JOHANNESBURG (SA)	*African Premeir*	**SEPTEMBER 2-11, 2021**
ARSHT CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS, MIAMI (USA)		**DECEMBER 4-11, 2021 TBC**
SCHWARZMAN CENTER, YALE UNIVERSITY (USA)		**MARCH 31-APRIL 3, 2022**
MUSÉE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN DE MONTRÉAL (CA)		**SPRING 2022 TBC**





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PHOTOS BY STELLA OLIVIER

William Kentridge is represented by
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