

William Kentridge, Triumphs and Laments: A Project for Rome, Piazza Tevere, Rome

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William Kentridge

Triumphs and Laments: A Project for Rome, Piazza Tevere, Rome, 2016.

Photos : Sebastiano Luciano

William Kentridge

Triumphs and Laments: A Project for Rome

Rome is a palimpsest of ideas accumulated through millennia of victories, defeats, and the passage of countless lives played out within the city's walls. Since April 2016, this coexistence of past and present has been physically manifest in Rome's public space. William Kentridge's five hundred-metre frieze recreates iconic and iconoclastic images of the city's past by selectively erasing the patina from the travertine banks of the Tiber River. Inhabiting the intersections of familiar/unfamiliar, tangible/intangible, and authored/collective knowledge, *Triumphs and Laments: A Project for Rome* invites us to question our ideas of the city.

Kentridge positions the archive of Rome's history not as a source of knowledge, but as an impetus to its discovery. Through his procession of silhouettes the artist has subtly disrupted iconic figures. Marcello Mastroianni and Anita Ekberg embrace in a diminutive bath-cum-shower instead of frolicking in the Trevi Fountain, while a murdered Aldo Moro slumps alongside an ecstatic Saint Teresa. Kentridge has elsewhere explored twentieth-century Italy, and cites *La Dolce Vita* as an influential vision of Italy. His reconfigured images appear to be claiming artistic authority. Yet these public works reside between the familiar and the alien, and are presented without the institutional trappings of wall text to inform their meaning. They are emphatically open to interpretation. Kentridge's invitation to find "a sense of history from fragments" places knowledge within the hands of his transient, anonymous viewers.

Fragmentation is central to the new historical understanding prompted by *Triumphs and Laments*. His Judaea triumph from the Arch of Titus is painfully ruptured. Ragged and dismembered soldiers struggle to uphold broken placards of Roman victory. This is not Kentridge's reimagining of the scene. His 'triumph' faithfully reproduces the current state of the nearly two thousand-year-old relief. In the Forum

Romanum these figures are softened by the sympathetic condition of the surrounding architecture, and the weight of history and monumentality gives dignity to their broken forms. But exposed against the newly-cleaned banks of the Tiber River, the figures' fragmentation is unavoidably raw. Kentridge's archive suggests that a more poignant history is latent in the image. *Triumphs and Laments* celebrates Kentridge's exploration of "triumph in the lament and the lament in the triumph..." in both history and the documents that record its passing. Elsewhere in the frieze, the words "quello che non ricordo" ("that which I do not remember") are inscribed in a black square. By not shying away from the intrinsic fragility of his sources, Kentridge confronts the anxiety of knowledge-loss as a contributor to the city's past in its present.

Despite being etched in stone, Kentridge's procession is in a state of constant flux. As his figures are reclaimed by the stone banks' patina, the physical traces of this new chapter in the city's history will be lost. But its knowledge will be perpetuated in the communal space of collective memory. The tangible figures of *Triumphs and Laments* will have left their imprint upon Rome's intangible knowledge.

Monique Webber

Piazza Tevere, Rome,
April 2016—ongoing