

WILLIAM KENTRIDGE
Sharpen Your Philosophy

Public opening Thursday 29 January 2026, h 6 pm – 8 pm

Galleria Lia Rumma | Via Stilicone, 19 | MILAN

Opening hours: from Tuesday to Saturday from h 11 am to 1:30 pm and from h 2:30 pm to 7 pm

On Thursday, 29 January 2026, Galleria Lia Rumma opens, at its Milan venue, the new solo exhibition by William Kentridge titled *Sharpen Your Philosophy*.

The South African artist, internationally renowned for his animated films, drawings, tapestries, sculptures, and theatre productions, returns to exhibit in Milan, further consolidating his nearly thirty-year collaboration with Galleria Lia Rumma, developed over the years through numerous permanent and temporary projects in Italy.

For this new exhibition project, Kentridge presents a poetic and varied body of recent works—including drawings and prints, a diorama, large and medium-scale aluminum and bronze sculptures, and video installations—which reflect his ongoing exploration of complex themes such as displacement, identity, and the elusive nature of knowledge.

In the ground-floor gallery, Kentridge metaphorically retraces the sea voyage undertaken in 1941 by a group of European intellectuals fleeing war and Nazi persecution, who travelled from Marseille to Martinique. Among them were the Surrealist André Breton, the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, and the Cuban painter Wifredo Lam. This historical episode recurs throughout the works on display, which brush against and contaminate one another without losing their singularity, constructing a geography of distances and resonances—an ensemble of accords and tonalities rather than a fully resolved harmony. *Sharpen Your Philosophy*, the work that gives the exhibition its title, is a folding screen that marks the beginning of this journey, evoking a forced migration toward an unknown future in a world destined to repeat its mistakes. These themes also emerge in the cardboard masks mounted on the wall, which are held in front of the faces of performers in Kentridge's recent theatrical production *The Great Yes, The Great No* (the title of a poem by the Greek poet Konstantinos Kavafis), as well as in the sculptures from the "Paper Procession" series shown on the ground and first floors. These anthropomorphic silhouettes, made from torn fragments of paper from a nineteenth-century Sicilian ledger that are replicated in oil paint on thin sheets of aluminum, give body and form—as the artist explains—to puppet-like figures or even tree-like shapes that populate a world of exiles. In the large video installation *To Cross One More Sea*, which recounts the 1941 journey and whose composition echoes a ship rocking in deep waters, Kentridge distances the work from its specific historical context, transforming it into a kind of new ark that stands as a symbol of the countless forced migrations of the past and the present.

The upper floors host bronze sculptures, drawings and prints, as well as a number of elements—a leporello and vinyl records accompanied by original drawings—that revisit the scenes created by Kentridge and the music composed by Philip Miller for *Triumphs and Laments*, the monumental frieze unveiled along the Tiber river in Rome in 2016, now almost entirely "erased" by time.

On the top floor, the video *Fugitive Words* (2024) shows the artist's hands leafing through the pages of one of his notebooks—a vital part of his creative process—where a multitude of animated ink and charcoal drawings appear: sketches, portraits of Kentridge and his parents, as well as musical scores, diagrams, lists, and phrases. This long sequence sees even the drawing tools come to life, creating an emotional landscape of memory and transformation. Blurred traces of a thought in constant becoming, where nothing is definitive and everything can generate connections, contaminations, and unexpected forms.

The drawing *Seven Kitchen Objects*, the artist's homage to the still life paintings of Giorgio Morandi, establishes a connection with several works by Kentridge currently on view in Milan at the different venues of the exhibition *Metafisica / Metafisiche*, between Palazzo Reale and Palazzo Citterio.

William Kentridge (born Johannesburg, South Africa, 1955) is internationally acclaimed for his drawings, films, theatre and opera productions. His method combines drawing, writing, film, performance, music, theatre, and collaborative practices to create works of art that are grounded in politics, science, literature and history, yet maintaining a space for contradiction and uncertainty. Kentridge's work has been seen in museums and galleries around the world since the 1990s, including the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Albertina Museum in Vienna, Musée du Louvre in Paris, Whitechapel Gallery in London, Louisiana Museum in Copenhagen, the Reina Sofia museum in Madrid, the Kunstmuseum in Basel, Zeitz MOCAA and the Norval Foundation in Cape Town and the Royal Academy of Arts in London. He has participated a number of times in Documenta in Kassel (2012, 2002, 1997) and the Venice Biennale (2015, 2013, 2005, 1999 and 1993). Opera productions include Mozart's The Magic Flute, Shostakovich's The Nose, and Alban Berg's operas Lulu and Wozzeck, and have been seen at opera houses including the Metropolitan Opera in New York, La Scala in Milan, English National Opera in London, Opera de Lyon, Amsterdam opera, the Sydney Opera House and the Salzburg Festival. In 2016 Kentridge founded the Centre for Less Good Idea in Johannesburg: a space for responsive thinking and making through experimental, collaborative and cross-disciplinary arts practices. His work can be found in the collections of the most prestigious museums and institutions, as well as private collections worldwide. Kentridge has a long record of exhibitions and projects in Italy, including solo shows at Castello di Rivoli (2004), MAXXI in Rome (2012), Palazzo Branciforte in Palermo (2023) and Palazzo Collicola in Spoleto (2025) and the monumental frieze "Triumphs and Laments" created on the Lungotevere in Rome in 2016. His work is currently on view at Yorkshire Sculpture Park, while upcoming projects in 2026 include the opera "L'Orfeo" at Glyndebourne and solo exhibitions at Kunsthalle Praha in Prague and BOZAR in Brussels.