

Press release

WILLIAM KENTRIDGE Preparing the Flute

**Opening Wednesday 16 November 2005, 5.00 pm – 9.00 pm,
Galleria Lia Rumma, Naples**

During 2005, William Kentridge was responsible for the sets and the direction of *The Magic Flute* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart for the opening of the new season of Brussels La Monnaie/De Munt Opera House, as part of an initiative promoted by the same theatre with Foundation of the San Carlo Opera House in Naples, the Lille Opera House and the Theatre of Caen. The project to be shown at the Lia Rumma Gallery in Naples is entitled *Preparing the Flute* and presents a reduced scale interior of a theatre which refers to the set design adopted in Brussels. The structure has a series of five progressive wings which mark out the perspective of the space and act as a frame for the video projected onto the end wall. At the same time other animated images, these also drawn with white lines onto a black background are projected frontally using the lateral wings as screens. The video and the drawings on display in the exhibition show landscapes and figures that allude, often in ironical fashion, to the events and characters from Mozart's opera. In this way, the themes which are already present in other of Kentridge's works – such as the caged lion, the metamorphosis whereby objects are transformed into animals, the broken lines that become brightly lit paths... – are joined by many other elements related to the story. The theatre thus becomes a sort of constantly changing "magic box", beginning with the rocky landscape upon which appear images referring to ancient Egypt, its temples, pyramids and obelisks. The references to Egyptian civilisation form a symbolic allusion to the attainment of knowledge and wisdom, which represents one of the key elements of *The Magic Flute*. Indeed, at the end of Mozart's libretto, the young protagonist Tamino is led to a temple in order to acquire Wisdom. Referring to the ordeals that the main character must undergo, the video designed by Kentridge begins by showing a temple dedicated to Wisdom, followed by one dedicated to Reason and lastly a temple dedicated to Nature. Another element alluding to knowledge is the giant eye, a theme that crops up repeatedly both in the drawings and the video. In other cases, the strong contrast between light and shadow define and clarify the true nature of some of the characters. For example, the set becomes an enormous darkened room in relation to the evil Night Queen, while it is transformed into an explosion of light in relation to the mysterious Sarastro.

As early as the seventies, William Kentridge displayed a keen interest in theatre and cinema, working as director, writer, set designer and actor. His numerous, renowned theatre projects to which he has devoted his attention in recent years include the theatre version of the *Confessions of Zeno*, inspired by the Italo Svevo's novel, staged in 2002 and featuring the combination of a video, live actors and reflected shadows, and *The Return of Ulysses*, inspired by Claudio Monteverdi's opera, performed on various occasions beginning from 1999, with puppets, animation and live performance. His most famous videos feature the work *Medicine Chest*, an animated film projected within a medicine cabinet.

The showing of the video and the drawings that comprise *Preparing the Flute* use the well-established technique pioneered by the artist which involves recording the various stages and transformations of his drawings with photographic images. These images, which display evident signs of the modifications that they have undergone, are placed in sequence, thus creating the final animation.

William Kentridge, born in Johannesburg in 1955 where he lives and works, has taken part in recent years in some of the main events devoted to contemporary art, such as Documenta at Kassel in 1997 and 2002 and the Venice Biennial in 1993 and 1999. He has also had numerous personal exhibitions of his work in the most prestigious museums in the world such as the Palais des Beaux Arts in Brussels, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. His first retrospective exhibition in an Italian museum was held in 2004 in the Castle of Rivoli, subsequently becoming a travelling exhibition shown in the museums of Düsseldorf, Sydney, Montréal and Johannesburg.