

TATE MODERN

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THE
HEAD
&
THE
LOAD

WILLIAM
KENTRIDGE

THE HEAD & THE LOAD

William Kentridge
Philip Miller
Thuthuka Sibisi
Gregory Maqoma
The Knights

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 the 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 recognise and record.

William Kentridge



**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.

Likewise, the original music by Philip Miller and Thuthuka Sibisi includes transformed traditional African songs as well as quotations from European composers from the time of the war like Maurice Ravel, Erik Satie, Paul Hindemith and Arnold Schoenberg.

**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*.

**JENNY
WALDMAN**
Director, 14–18 NOW

From the moment the first shots were fired in 1914 – not on the Western Front but in Togoland, then a German colony – Africa and its peoples played pivotal roles in the First World War. More than 2 million Africans saw service during the conflict, including some 1.5 million porters and carriers who served the British, French and German forces.

Their stories are not widely known and not often told, at least in this country. The war memorials across the UK remind us of those who left to fight in the conflict and never made it home, and the history lessons in our schools focus on the Western Front. We rarely reflect on those from the former British colonies who fought and died, nor on the impact of the First World War on countries that were then part of empires.

This new work from William Kentridge goes some way towards righting this wrong: aiming, in his words, to “recognise and record” the deeds and actions of the Africans whose invisible heroism during the First World War has long gone unacknowledged. The creation of such an epic and ambitious work has required the input and involvement of a great many individuals and organisations, and my thanks go to Tate Modern, whose Turbine Hall gives *The Head & the Load* the spectacular setting it deserves; to our commissioning partners; to Marian Goodman Gallery, Goodman Gallery and Lia Rumma Gallery; to all the generous individuals who have supported the creation and presentation of the work; and, most of all, to William Kentridge, Philip Miller and the entire creative team and cast.

The Head & the Load is a major commission for the final year of 14–18 NOW, the UK’s five-year arts programme for the First World War centenary. Continuing throughout the UK until the end of 2018, our closing season includes two further works focused on Africa: *SS Mendi: Dancing the Death Drill* from South Africa’s Isango Ensemble, currently at NST City in Southampton, and John Akomfrah’s *African Soldier*, a multimedia installation that can be seen at IWM London from September and at Nottingham’s New Art Exchange in 2019. For more details, see 1418NOW.org.uk. I hope you can join us again this year.

**FRANCES
MORRIS**
Director, Tate Modern

Tate Modern is committed to telling relevant and complex stories through art. *The Head & the Load* brings long overdue attention to the role of Africans in the First World War, recognising the weight of a history made heavier by its invisibility. We are privileged to be premiering this poignant new performance devised by William Kentridge, Philip Miller and their collaborators.

In Europe during the First World War, weapons were transported predominantly by rail and horse. In Africa, war supplies were carried on people’s backs while the porters and their people starved and diseases spread. Meanwhile on the Western Front, African soldiers were frequently used as cannon fodder. In this moving new performance, we experience the story of the thousands of Africans whose lives were seen as so expendable that their service and deaths were not even properly recorded.

If one is uncertain of where to look during this performance, and at times find it absurd, that is deliberate. How else can one reflect the scale of the disaster and the senselessness of losing one’s life for a cause that is not one’s own?

A work of this magnitude, both in terms of its scale and artistic ambitions, takes extraordinary vision and the talent and dedication of many to realise. We are indebted to the creative team and performers for bringing us *The Head & the Load*, and to the many people behind the scenes who have helped realise this performance. Tate’s special partnership with 14–18 NOW, supported by the Naomi Milgrom Foundation and William Kentridge’s three galleries, has enabled us to partake in the centenary commemorations of the end of the First World War in ways that feel true to our wider mission. For this we express our gratitude.



ACT 1
MANIFESTOS

MANIFESTOS
MORSECODE / SWAHILI PHRASEBOOK
URSONATE
ORDERS & COMMANDS
RECRUITING
PROCESSION TO WAR

ACT 2
PARADOX

EIGHT THINGS
TROUBLES OF THE BODY
CHILEMBWE'S LETTER
PLAYING AGAINST HISTORY
GOD SAVE THE KING
AMAKATSI

ACT 3
WAR

KAISER WALTZ
RUNNING
RUNNING & FALLING
JE TE VEUX
WOUNDED MAN
ADVANCED ARITHMETIC
RETURN FROM WAR PROCESSION
INDEPENDENCE
CODA / DEATH LIST

CREATIVE TEAM

Concept and Director: William Kentridge
Composer: Philip Miller
Video Design: Catherine Meyburgh, Janus Fouché, Žana Marović
Co-composer / Music Director: Thuthuka Sibisi
Choreography: Gregory Maqoma
Costume Design: Greta Goiris
Set Design: Sabine Theunissen
Lighting Design: Urs Schönebaum
Associate Director: Luc De Wit
Sound Design: Mark Grey
Cinematography: Duško Marović
Orchestration: Michael Atkinson, Philip Miller

PERFORMED AND CREATED BY

ACTORS: Mncedisi Shabangu, Hamilton Dlamini, Luc De Wit, Nhlanhla Mahlangu
FEATURED VOCALISTS & PERFORMERS: Joanna Dudley, Ann Masina, Bham Ntabeni, N`faly Kouyate, Sipho Seroto
DANCERS: Gregory Maqoma, Julia Zenzie Burnham, Thulani Chauke, Xolani Dlamini, Nhlanhla Mahlangu
MUSICIANS: Vincenzo Pasquariello (piano), Tlale Makhene (percussion), N`faly Kouyate (kora)
ENSEMBLE VOCALISTS: Mhlaba Buthelezi, Ayanda Eleki, Grace Magubane, Ncokwane Lydia Manyama, Tshegofatso Moeng, Mapule Moloj, Lindokuhle Thabede
With THE KNIGHTS: Michael P. Atkinson (French horn), Sam Budish (percussion), Shawn Conley (bass), Christina Courtin (violin), Samuel Ewens (trumpet), Mario Gotoh (viola), Colin Jacobsen (violin), Nicolas Jones (trombone), Nathan Koci (accordion), Adrian Miotti (tuba), David Nelson (trombone), Andrew Rehrig (flute), Caitlin Sullivan (cello)

PRODUCTION

Producer: THE OFFICE performing arts + film – Rachel Chanoff, Laurie Cearley, Lynn Koek, Catherine DeGennaro, Noah Bashevken, Olli Chanoff, Diane Eber, Gabrielle Davenport
Production Manager: Brendon Boyd
Technical Director: Mike Edelman
Studio Technical Director: Chris Waldo de Wet

PRODUCTION (CONT.)

Stage Manager: Sara Sahin
Video Controller: Kim Gunning
Assistant Stage Manager: Lissy Barnes-Flint
Costume Supervisor: Judith Stokart
Set Assistant: Marine Fleury
Costume Maker: Emmanuelle Erhart
Sound: Sound Intermedia – David Sheppard, Ian Dearden
Studio Fabricator: Jacques van Staden
Scenic Painter: Anaïs Thomas
Photographer: Stella Olivier
Company Manager: Carol Blanco
Interns: Sigi Koerner, Stephanie Barker, Luke Gibson

ADDITIONAL CREDITS

William Kentridge Studio: Anne McIlleron, Linda Leibowitz
14–18 NOW: Jenny Waldman, Sud Basu, Claire Eva, Nigel Hinds, Morag Small, Pak Ling Wan
THE KNIGHTS Artistic Directors: Colin Jacobsen, Eric Jacobsen
Quatenaire
Executive Director: Shruti Adhar
Video Documentation: Lone Star Productions
Tate: Achim Borchardt-Hume, Kerryn Greenberg, Edwina Marks, Pete Reynolds, Anna Steeden, Katie Booth, Hector Dyer, Polly Rayns, Tracey Ferguson, Rachael Young, Kitty Malton, Stephen Stewart, Emily Bowen, Katie Yook
The Cogency
Bolton & Quinn
Wise Productions
T&S Immigration Services Ltd
Philanthropic Consultants: Valerie Lynch and Jean Tatge Consulting

SPECIAL THANKS

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DAVID OLUSOGA

On 12 August 1914 the first shot by a member of the British forces in the First World War was fired. The soldier who levelled his rifle and took that historic shot was an African, a man who was fighting on his own continent against an enemy force largely made up of other Africans. His name was Alhaji Grunshi, a Regimental Sergeant Major in the British West African Frontier Force, part of an Anglo-French force invading the German colony Togoland, present day Togo. The aim of the invasion was to seize the colony and destroy a radio transmitting station that lay inland, near the settlement of Kamina. Days later, transmitters on the coasts of Germany's other African colonies – today the nations of Tanzania, Cameroon and Namibia – were battered to rubble by Royal Navy warships or captured by African troops led by British, Belgian or French officers.

The First World War was felt in Africa before the Western Front had formed and before a shot had been fired by the British Expeditionary Force in France. Shots continued to be fired on African soil for the next four years. Indeed the last German assault took place in what is now Zambia on 13 November 1918, two days after the Armistice, as German forces in Africa were unaware that the guns had been silenced on the Western Front.

Although few people in 1914 envisaged or described the conflict as a 'world war', African involvement was inevitable. By 1914 European powers effectively owned Africa, ruling over 90% of the continent. Only two states, Ethiopia and Liberia, remained independent, while the rest of Africa was divided between France, Britain, Portugal, Belgium, Germany, Italy and Spain.

Britain and her allies did not go to war in order to capture Germany's colonial empire. However, once the conflict had begun, they happily did so and the First World War became, in effect, the final stage in the *Scramble for Africa*, with the German colonies being distributed to the victorious nations in 1919.

Three of Germany's four African colonies – Togo, Cameroon and Namibia – were rapidly conquered. The invasion of the fourth, Tanzania, resulted in military disaster for the British and Indian forces. After repelling the initial British invasion the

Germans launched an insurgency that dragged on until 1918, costing the lives of hundreds of thousands of Africans.

The number of Africans drawn into the First World War is unknown and unknowable. Almost 200,000 Africans fought in the French Army. Meanwhile across the continent the conscription of manpower resulted in famines, which likely caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people. It was, however, the campaigns fought by the western allies against the German forces in East Africa that consumed the labour and the lives of Africans in vast numbers. The majority of Africans involved served not as soldiers but porters – often referred to as carriers. They marched by foot, following the combat units over vast distances. Across British-ruled Africa, the recruitment of African men was compulsory. Chiefs who resisted the levees were threatened with fines or imprisonment. In the latter stages of the war the increasingly desperate German forces openly abducted men from their villages. As no army kept comprehensive records, the death toll among the Africans who served as carriers cannot be determined. Around a million Africans are thought to have served under the British forces and perhaps 350,000 served the Germans. One estimate suggested that the number who died under German command was between 100,000 and 120,000. Other sources suggest that at least 100,000 African carriers died while attached to the British forces.



The colonial regiments in the British army, 1914–1918 © Imperial War Museum (Q 67822A)

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All images of rehearsals at MASS MoCA and Kentridge Studio © Stella Olivier

AFTERMATH:
ART IN THE WAKE OF WORLD WAR ONE
Tate Britain
5 June – 23 September 2018

Marking the 100 years since the end of World War One, *Aftermath: Art in the Wake of World War One* looks at how artists in Britain, France and Germany responded to the physical and psychological scars left on Europe.



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