# STAFF REPORT

**Meeting Date:** June 16, 2015

**To:** Honorable Mayor & City Council

**From:** Nancy Hunt-Coffey, Assistant Director of Community Services

**Subject:** Recommendation by City Council Fine Art liaisons and Fine Art Commission to purchase *World On Its Hind Legs* by William Kentridge

**Attachments:**
1. Pictures of *World On Its Hind Legs*
2. Recommended placement of the piece
3. Letters of support

---

## INTRODUCTION

The City Council Fine Art liaisons and the Fine Art Commission recommend the purchase of *World On Its Hind Legs* (WOHL) by South African artist William Kentridge to be placed on the Burton Way median, between Rexford and Foothill the "all in" cost including price of artwork, shipping, transport, construction of installation pad, electrical, one studio representative supervising the installation and contingency is expected not to exceed $556,000. Funds for this project would come from the Fine Art Fund which is reserved for art related expenses.

## DISCUSSION

William Kentridge is a world renowned South African artist who works in various media, including drawings, animated films, opera stage design, tapestries and sculpture. His works are owned by numerous museums, including the Museum of Modern Art, the Tate, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. His art has been shown in numerous shows, including dOCUMENTA, Venice Bienniale and the Louvre.

City Council Fine Art liaisons Gold and Bosse recommended the purchase of World On its Hind Legs earlier in 2015. The Fine Art liaisons are presently Councilmembers Bosse and Krasne. Councilmember Krasne has been briefed on the proposed acquisition of this piece, and she is also supportive of the purchase. The Fine Art Commission voted unanimously to acquire this piece.

World On Its Hind Legs (WOHL) measures 13.5' x 10' x 16'; it is made of painted galvanized steel; and it weighs 9,000 pounds. The sculpture can be viewed from all directions. There are two viewpoints on the piece that "gather" into a cohesive image—one which creates the image of "The World on its Hind Legs" and the other with a red

circle as a face. The representative for the artist says, "Each angle is part of the visual mechanics of the piece, and the sculpture as a whole is a dynamic three dimensional work which is visually interesting from all sides and includes both moments of dynamic abstraction, and moments that appear to be that of an almost two dimensional representation." This piece is currently installed in Johannesburg, South Africa.

WOHL is proposed to be placed on the Burton Way median, between Rexford Dr. and Foothill Dr., east of the red sculpture *Sisyphus*. It would be placed approximately in front of the Beverly Hills Courthouse. It should be noted that staff is reviewing engineering plans to ensure that the piece is placed appropriately in relation to existing underground utilities. Staff is also mindful of avoiding the proposed easement for Southern California Edison on that block of Burton Way. Finally, the piece has been shared with the consultants who are examining Burton Way for possible revitalization with drought tolerant plantings, to ensure that it will complement any potential changes that may be considered in the future.

## FISCAL IMPACT

The cost for World On Its Hind Legs is approximately $475,000, depending on the currency exchange rates. However, there are a number of ancillary costs such as crating and shipping, transportation and installation, construction of a pad and lighting, etc., so the total project cost is estimated not to exceed $556,000. These costs would be borne by the Fine Art Fund which is a restricted fund that can only be used for fine art related expenses. As of May 21, 2015, the Fine Art Fund balance was $2,925,903.

## RECOMMENDATION

The City Council Fine Art liaisons and the Fine Art Commission recommend the purchase of *World On Its Hind Legs* by William Kentridge to be installed on Burton Way median.

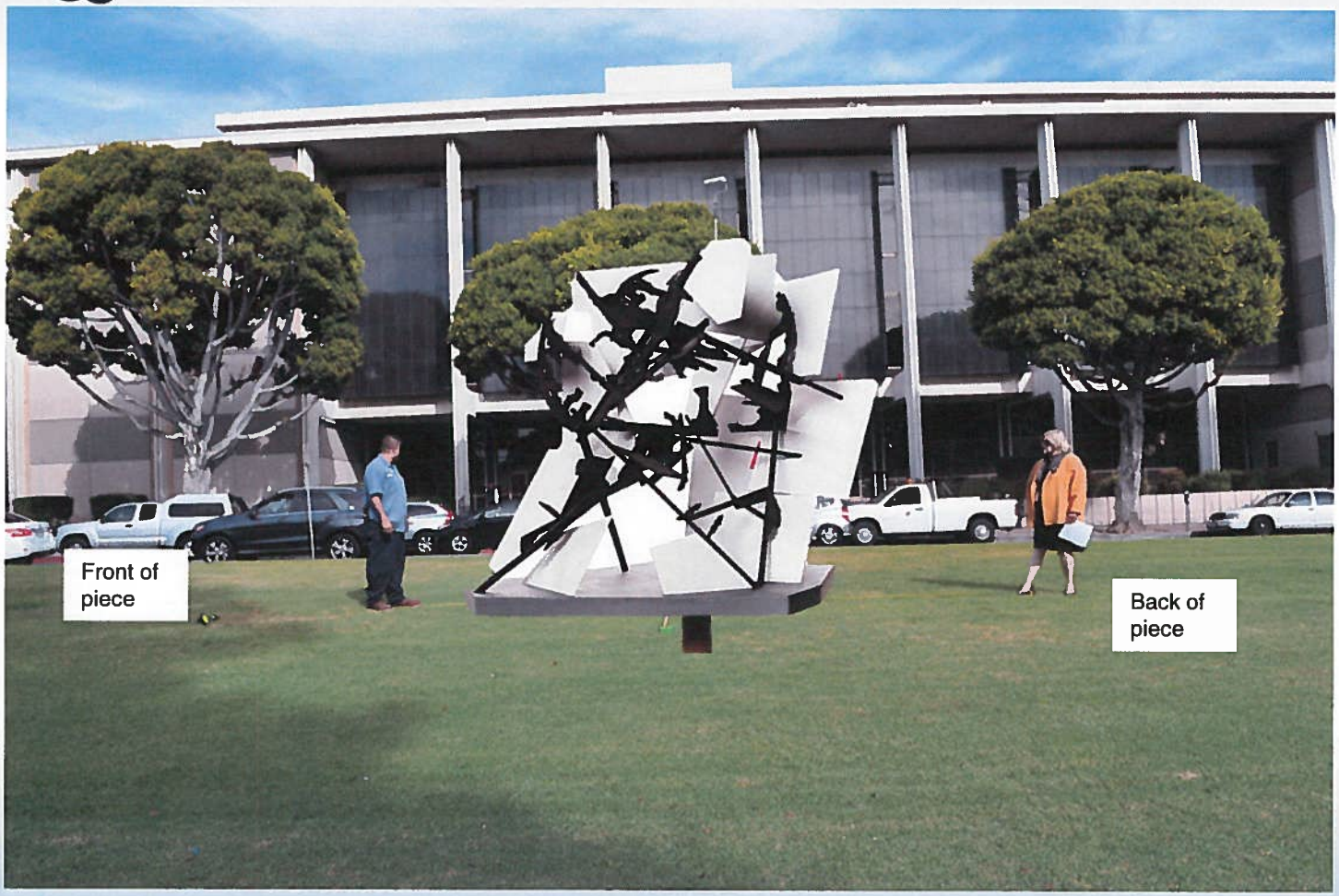
Nancy Hunt-Coffey

Nancy Hunt-Coffey
Approved By

# Attachment 1

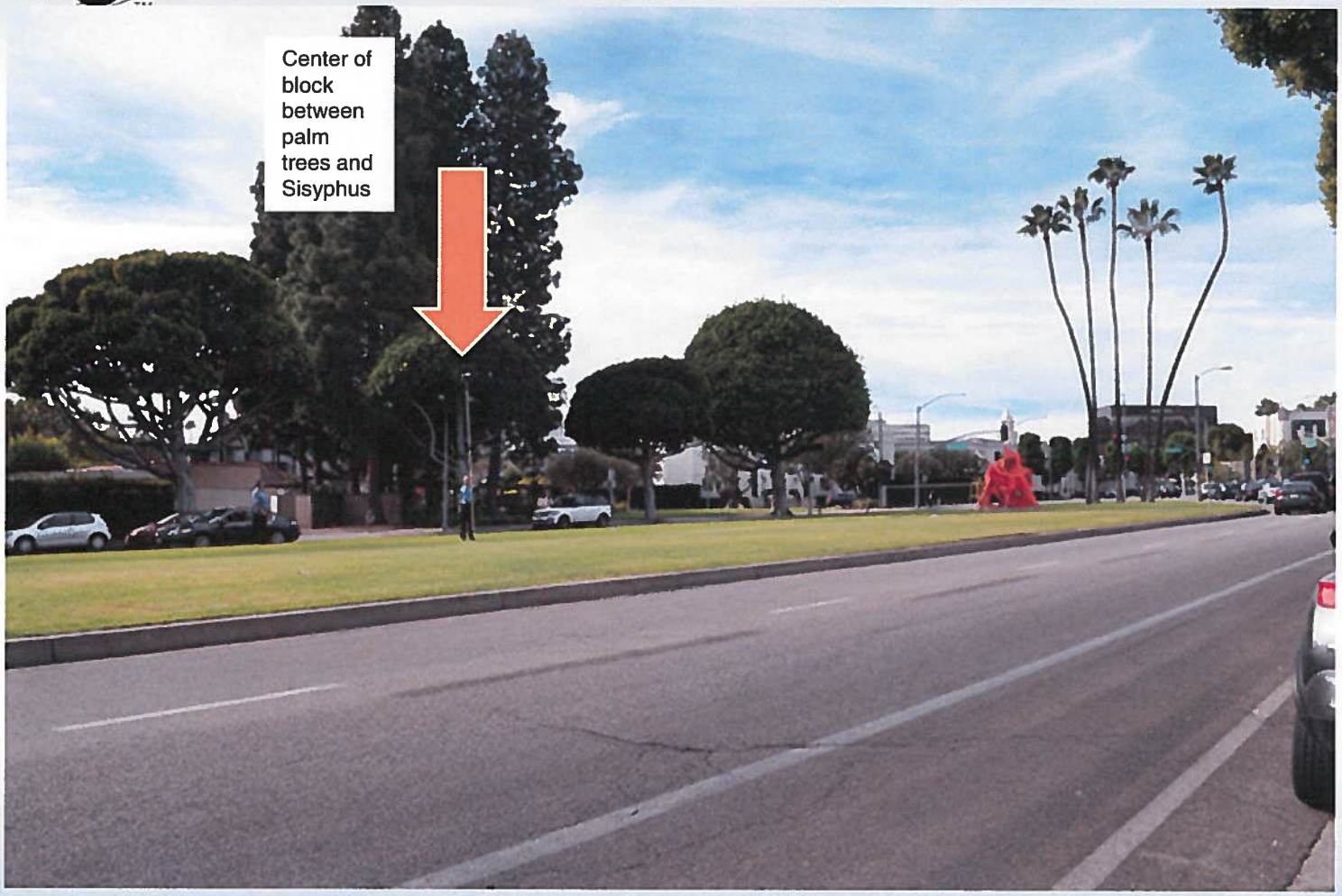
# Attachment 2

# Wm. Kentridge




Suggested Placement on Burton Way (side view)

# Wm. Kentridge




Burton Way heading west bound.

# Attachment 3

January 20, 2015

Fine Art Commission
City of Beverly Hills
455 North Rexford Drive
Beverly Hills, CA. 90210

To whom it may concern:

We are writing in support of your consideration of siting a sculpture by William Kentridge in the city of Beverly Hills. We have followed the artist's career as it has developed over the past twenty-five years, and without hesitation or qualification, we can state that he is among the most important artists working internationally in our time. The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art organized a retrospective of his work in 2009 that toured nationally and internationally to numerous museums, including The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Albertina Museum, Vienna, and the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Israel. It was the most sought after exhibition that the museum has ever organized with exceptional attendance and critical acclaim in every city in which it was presented.

Kentridge grew up in South Africa where he continues to live and work. His art is deeply rooted in the social and cultural tensions arising from apartheid and its collapse. But Kentridge was not interested in focusing on a direct social message in his work. Rather he was drawn to the deeper and broader subject of finding expression for the psychological and cultural forces that drive individuals and in turn drive society. He looked back to great artists of earlier generations, such as Goya, Max Beckmann, and Picasso as precedents, who created paintings and sculptures that were specific to their historical period and circumstances but which we continue to honor today and whose work remains relevant to our own times.

Kentridge has been not only a keen observer and witness to the tumult of life in South African but also is a passionate and learned student of European culture—literature, philosophy, music, and theater. His work resonates with a depth of inquiry into the human condition that spans centuries. It points to the necessity of reckoning with memory, history, and knowledge; it sustains a critical probing of the complexities of our individual lives with society.

He is an artist who works diligently to be a master of his materials and craft. The images he creates whether as two-dimensional drawings and films or as three-dimensional sculptures and installations are succinctly expressive and beautifully rendered. They have an immediate presence and power. His art has the rare capacity to captivate not only the most sophisticated audience for art but also people for whom art is not generally a part of their lives.

In short, Kentridge is an artist whose work would have exceptional importance and appeal placed in a public site. The city of Beverly Hills would be privileged to be a home for a work by this most extraordinary artist.

Sincerely,

Neal Benezra
Director

Gary Garrels
Elise S. Haas Senior Curator
of Painting and Sculpture

SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
151 THIRD STREET • SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94103-3107
TEL 415 357 4000 FAX 415 357 4037
WWW SFMOMA ORG

**The Museum of Modern Art**

**Glenn D. Lowry**
**Director**

February 5, 2015

Re: William Kentridge

Fine Art Commission
City of Beverly Hills
455 North Rexford Drive
Beverly Hills, CA 90210

Dear Fine Art Commission Liaisons,

It is with great pleasure that we write to offer The Museum of Modern Art's fullest support of the Beverly Hills Fine Art Commission's consideration of the purchase and permanent installation of a work by renowned artist William Kentridge.

Having had experience with nearly three decades of Kentridge's work in our 2010 large scale exhibition, *William Kentridge: Five Themes*, Kentridge is a remarkably versatile artist, fueled by movement and improvisation. His practice, characterized by an elegant, lyrical, and frequently comedic aesthetic, has proven successful in public settings and his work is certainly equal in skill to those artists who have already made contributions to the City of Beverly Hills' public art program.

Kentridge has, in the past five years, demonstrated his ability to successfully transfer exceptional draftsmanship to large-scale bronze sculpture which proves him a natural fit among the artists who have already received support from the Fine Art Commission.

The purchase and permanent installation of a sculpture by William Kentridge will continue to solidify the City of Beverly Hills' reputation as a leader in the area of public art.

Sincerely yours,

Glenn D. Lowry

**MoMA** 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY 10019-5497 Tel: (212) 708-9773 Fax: (212) 708-9744 glenn_lowry@moma.org

HAMMER

January 29, 2015

Re: William Kentridge

Fine Art Commission
City of Beverly Hills
455 North Rexford Drive
Beverly Hills, CA 90210

Dear Fine Art Commission Liaisons,

It is with great pleasure that we write to offer the Hammer Museum's fullest support of the Beverly Hills Fine Art Commission's consideration of the purchase and permanent installation of a work by renowned artist William Kentridge.

Having had first-hand experience of Kentridge's recent solo exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, it is clear that he is an artist of significant importance. Kentridge's practice extends across media and has distinguished itself formally and thematically over the last three decades. His work is matched in quality and skill to those artists whose iconic contributions to the City of Beverly Hills' public art program have become an important part of city's identity as a cultural leader which engages intellectually challenging art. Solo exhibitions in the world's most renowned institutions and regular inclusion in venerable international group exhibitions such as Documenta X (1997), XI (2002), and XIII (2012) and the Venice Biennale in 1993, 1999, and 2005 make Kentridge a natural fit among the artists who have already received support from the Fine Art Commission.

Kentridge's practice, defined by the artist's elegant, lyrical, and frequently comedic aesthetic, has proven successful in public settings. Turning to public installations in the last five years, Kentridge has already demonstrated his ability to successfully transfer exceptional draftsmanship to large-scale bronze sculpture in Johannesburg and Naples. *World on It's Hind Legs* is an strong representation of the artist's work and would be an exceptional sculpture for the City of Beverly Hills. First installed at the Apartheid Museum on a hilltop overlooking Johannesburg, the sculpture was translated from a drawing and floats between two and three dimensions while maintaining his unique aesthetic. Its reference to colonialism and industrialization through accessible, almost playful forms epitomize the formal and thematic style that has earned Kentridge's international reputation.

The purchase and permanent installation of a sculpture by William Kentridge will continue to solidify the City of Beverly Hills' reputation as a leader in the area of public art.

Sincerely yours,

Ann Philbin
Director

Connie Butler
Chief Curator

Hammer Museum 10899 Wilshire Boulevard Los Angeles, CA 90024
310-443-7000 fax 310-443-7099 www.hammer.ucla.edu

LACMA LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART
5905 WILSHIRE BOULEVARD
LOS ANGELES CALIFORNIA 90036

FRANKLIN SIRMANS

TERRI AND MICHAEL SMOOKE CURATOR
AND DEPARTMENT HEAD
CONTEMPORARY ART
T 323 857 6026
F 323 857 6217
E FSIRMANS@LACMA.ORG

February 18, 2015

Fine Art Commission
City Hall, 455 No. Rexford Drive
Beverly Hills, CA

Dear Fine Arts Commission of Beverly Hills,

I am the department head and curator of contemporary art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) and was most recently the artistic director for the 2013-15 Prospect New Orleans Biennial.

A longtime admirer of the Beverly Hills Fine Arts Commission collection, I had the opportunity to present the work of Jaume Lensa a few years ago at an unveiling hosted by the commission.

It has come to my attention that an opportunity has arisen to acquire a William Kentridge sculpture for the Beverly Hills Fine Arts Commission. This unique opportunity presents itself at a time when Los Angeles continues to receive international recognition for fostering a community of artists and collections with an ever diversifying scope of global contemporary practices.

Draughtsman, filmmaker and sculptor, for over 30 years William Kentridge (b. Johannesburg 1955) has articulated the concerns of post-Apartheid South Africa through a wide range of materials. I have known Kentridge's work for a long time, and began writing about his works as 1997 in Flash Art Magazine. I also wrote the guide book for the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale that year which included the artist's work. Kentridge's addition to the Beverly Hills Fine Arts Commission is well suited to extend the conversation Los Angeles has long had through its public institutions in exploring the parallels between the art and film industries. During the 1980's, Kentridge directed television series and feature films, which evolved into the formation of his renowned series of hand drawn animated films depicting the end of the apartheid system. The important parallels Kentridge considers in his unique practice will be a strong asset to the collection of the Beverly Hills Fine Arts Commission.

Kentridge has participated in a number of international biennales including Documenta X (1997) XI (2002) and XIII (2012) as well as the Venice Biennale (2005, 1999 and 1993). He has been the recipient of numerous prizes including the Kyoto Prize (2010), the Oskar Kokoschka Award, Vienna (2008), the Kaiserring Prize (2003), the Carnegie Prize, the Carnegie International (2000), Standard Bank Young Artist Award (1987), and the Red Ribbon Award for Short Fiction (1982). His work has been exhibited widely throughout the world, including the Tate Modern, London (2012), the Louvre, Paris (2010), the Centre Pompidou, Paris (2002), the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C. (2002.)

In light of such accomplishments, I could not think of a better venue to display his sculptural work. The Beverly Hills Fine Arts Commission presents the unique opportunity for Kentridge's artwork to

work to be viewed by an international spectrum of audiences. I hope you consider this outstanding opportunity. Thank you for your consideration.

Best Regards,

Franklin Sirmans

Bankside
London SE1 9TG

T +44 (0)20 7887 8888
www.tate.org.uk

**Fine Art Commission**
**City of Beverly Hills**
**455 North Rexford Drive**
**Beverly Hills, CA 90210**

16 April 2015

Dear Sir

I am writing in support of William Kentridge's proposed outdoor sculpture, *The World on its Hind Legs*, to be sited in Beverly Hills. Kentridge is an internationally respected artist whose work is represented in Tate's collection. Though best known for his drawings, his opera sets, and his animated films, Kentridge's sculpture is also celebrated. Indeed I have seen a marvellous outdoor sculpture in Johannesburg – a work which from certain points of view resolves into an image of a woman with a brazier, an image that relates very closely to the daily life of the city.

I very much hope that his proposal for Beverly Hills is successfully received.

Dr. Mark Godfrey
Curator, International Art
Tate Modern