



"Reverse Graffiti" Reveals Rome's History

Beckett Mufson (/author/beckettmufson) — Mar 16 2016



Images courtesy the artist

South African artist [William Kentridge](https://www.artsy.net/artist/william-kentridge) (<https://www.artsy.net/artist/william-kentridge>) is bringing his style and skill set to Rome in an ambitious "reverse graffiti" mural, which uses the city's own accumulating grime to make a statement about history. The 550-meter-long work, [Triumphs and Laments](http://www.triumphsandlaments.com/) (<http://www.triumphsandlaments.com/>), will encompass 80 figures along

Rome's Tiber River, embodying various, well, triumphs and laments from the Italian capital's history. This will range from the wolf that nursed the legendary founders of Rome, Romulus and Remus, to a scene from Federico Fellini's iconic 1961 film *La Dolce Vita*.

"William Kentridge is a great world citizen, he has the ability tune into each situation and somehow instantly understand the complexities within," Kristin Jones, who helped organize *Triumphs and Laments*, tells The Creators Project. As the founder and artistic director of Tevereterno (<http://www.tevereterno.it/>), the non-profit organizing the mural, she worked intimately with Kentridge throughout every stage of the project, which is currently underway.



"The conversation about how to create a Rome-specific work on the enormous scale of Piazza Tevere in the heart of the historic city has been an ongoing dialogue since 2001," Jones continues. She initially proposed a massive mural in Kentridge's style that would eventually, like all the characters it depicts, be undone by time. As grime re-accumulates, all reverse graffiti fades, save for the memories (and Instagram posts). "William's idea was to embrace ALL of TIME from mythological time to the present tense reality of immigration. That the work would question how

history is told and by whom, that the greatest triumphs of Rome would be contrasted great tragedies," she says. The goal of these stories is to be contextualized within the current controversy surrounding refugees.



Once the sketches, viewable below, had been translated into large-scale stencils, the toughest part of *Triumphs and Laments* wasn't creative, but municipal. "The greatest challenge was to inspire and all the multiple bureaucracies to allow us to simply clean the wall and remove all the dark patina that was not part of William's drawings—and at no cost to the City of Rome," Jones says with an air of incredulity. "Much research was conducted many restorers and specialists were involved as advisors and and champions. In the end, we are simply using high pressure water to clean the accumulated biological patina that thrives on the travertine walls. The humidity, rainwater, and sunlight nourish the living wall just like the grass of a lawn except the lichen and fungi make a black patina not unlike William's charcoal drawings." Then, like history, they will fade away.







The [Kickstarter \(https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/13678860/william-kentridge-creates-art-history-on-romes-tib\)](https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/13678860/william-kentridge-creates-art-history-on-romes-tib) has 16 days remaining at the time of posting. Contributing to Kentridge's \$80,000 goal will help fund ten murals that other funding could not account for, and will gain you access to sneak peeks at the work, prints, tours, and more.

Learn more about the project on its official website, and contribute to the [Kickstarter here \(https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/13678860/william-kentridge-creates-art-history-on-romes-tib\)](https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/13678860/william-kentridge-creates-art-history-on-romes-tib).

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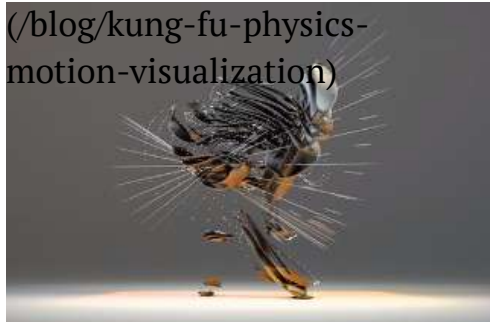
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