

Monumental figures of emperors and warriors etched onto embankments of Tiber in Rome

The project, based on an unusual technique, is the work of a South African artist, William Kentridge



When the project is officially inaugurated the friezes will run for more than 500 yards along the almost vertical stone walls Photo: Chris Warde-Jones

By Nick Squires, Rome

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A gigantic procession of figures from Rome's tumultuous history is taking shape along the banks of the Tiber River, in the capital's biggest open-air art project for decades.

The epic friezes are being created with an unusual technique – huge stencils are attached to the grimy, blackened walls of the embankment and jets of water are used to clean the exposed parts, returning sections of the travertine stone back to its original creamy white colour.

The result is a procession of 40ft-high figures from the city's 3,000 years of documented history, from centurions and legionaries to chariots, horsemen and sacrificial bulls.



A mural depicting the body of slain Italian writer Pier Paolo Pasolini

Emperors such as Marcus Aurelius jostle for space with the she-wolf that, according to legend, suckled Romulus and his brother Remus, the mythical founders of Rome.

There are also figures from Rome's more recent history, including Benito Mussolini, the fascist dictator, and Marcello Mastroianni and Anita Ekberg, who famously waded into the Trevi Fountain in the classic Fellini film, *La Dolce Vita*.

When the project is officially inaugurated on April 21, the friezes will run for more than 500 yards along the almost vertical stone walls of the Tiber embankment, which was built in the 19th century to prevent the city from flooding.



The project, called *Triumphs and Laments: A Project for the City of Rome*, is the work of William Kentridge, a South African artist.

The 90 monumental figures being inscribed on the banks of the Tiber are based on his original charcoal drawings.

“I’ve never worked on this scale before,” he told Italian television in a documentary about the work.



The idea is that the friezes are transient – they will fade in five to 10 years as the embankment walls gradually turn dark again with pollution, moss and lichen.

The huge embankment walls provide a blank canvas for the work, and the location, in the middle of the city, encapsulates some of Rome's contrasts and past tragedies – on one side is the Vatican, home to popes and the seat of the Catholic faith, while on the other is the Jewish Ghetto, where Jews were rounded up during the Second World War and sent to concentration camps.



“The Tiber is a river swollen with glory and pain. On one side the fortune of the popes, on the other the suffering of the Jewish Ghetto. Above ... a pulsating, splendid city; below, under the bridges, the desperation of the homeless,” Mr Kentridge told La Repubblica newspaper recently.

“It is bit like putting a stethoscope on the banks of the Tiber and listening to the city tell its story,”

he said.



It took more than a decade to realise the project, with the art work repeatedly held up by bureaucracy.

The embankment of the Tiber provided the backdrop to a spectacular car chase in the latest Bond film, *Spectre*, with Daniel Craig as 007 in an Aston Martin DB10, pursued by a villain called Mr Hinx, played by the American former wrestler Dave Bautista, in a Jaguar C-X75.

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