

**William Kentridge  
Exhibition**  
London, UK

When the William Kentridge Exhibition landed at the Royal Academy of Arts last year, **David Atkinson Lighting Design** produced a theatrical lighting scheme that would showcase the unique works of art.





Late last year, David Atkinson Lighting Design (DALD) completed the lighting design for the William Kentridge exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, which ran from September to December.

South Africa's most celebrated living artist, William Kentridge has, with his shows over the last decade, captured the imagination of the public – always large in scale, ambitious in scope, and astonishing in execution.

His globally acclaimed practice spans across etching, drawing, collage, film and sculpture, to tapestry, theatre, opera, dance, and music. Born in Johannesburg, Kentridge developed his early work during the apartheid regime of the 1980s, and his large-scale productions and animations have since been shown across the world.

The latest, the biggest exhibition of his work in the UK, transforms the Royal Academy of Arts' Main Galleries, with many pieces never seen before, and some made specifically for the show.

Spanning across a 40-year career, the exhibition featured large, four-metre-wide tapestries, his signature charcoal trees and flowers, and the breath-taking three-screen film, *Notes Towards a Model Opera* from 2015.

DALD was commissioned to illuminate the space by the Royal Academy of Arts, having previously worked with the RA on the Oceania exhibition. "The team felt that my theatrical approach would work well with the William Kentridge exhibition," David Atkinson, Founder of DALD, explained.

"The brief from the curators and exhibition designer was for the lighting design to have a theatrical, filmic quality, as well as to adhere to strict conservation levels (50lx) for any loaned works. I spent a lot of time researching William Kentridge's work in film and theatre to bring these influences into the overall lighting design."

On entering the Vestibule, visitors were presented with Kentridge's large, immersive sculpture, *Action*. The exhibit was lit by tightly controlled zoom profile fixtures positioned at a steep angle to accentuate its form and texture, with a cool, 4000K LED source chosen to give high contrast between the exhibit and dark background.

Most of the galleries throughout were either lit by medium or broad wall wash optic track fixtures, subject to the scale of the works being exhibited, and in some cases were fitted with warm or cool colour correction filters.

Atkinson explained further how the variety of works, both in style and scale, affected his approach to illuminating the space: "Subject to the scale of the work and the exhibition design, the lighting approach for each space was very different; for example, in the first gallery, which contained single works, they were tightly lit to offset them within the space."

"In contrast, the large scale tapestries in the fourth gallery were lit by broad wall wash optics fixtures, which in turn reflect off the works, giving the space a sense of openness."

"The third gallery space contained large projection screens with suspended sound cones. The space was treated filmatically, with the surrounding cork clad walls illuminated with a warm CTO correction filter and the suspended sound cones subtly highlighted by tightly controlled sources with daylight correct filters, with the reflected light coming from the projection screens, which helped to animate the space."

Control of the lighting throughout the exhibition was critical to help offset the exhibits within the galleries, as well as for the audio-visual projections, which play an important part in the immersive experience.

It also proved particularly essential, considering that DALD were utilising the Royal Academy's stock of iGuzzini Palco fixtures for the exhibition. "By adapting some of the existing stock lighting fixtures and fitting a variety of colour correction filters, it enabled the lighting to have a theatrical, immersive quality. Limiting the number of sources throughout the exhibition and controlling the intensity via Casambi helped to add a sensitive quality."

While the need to work within the building's





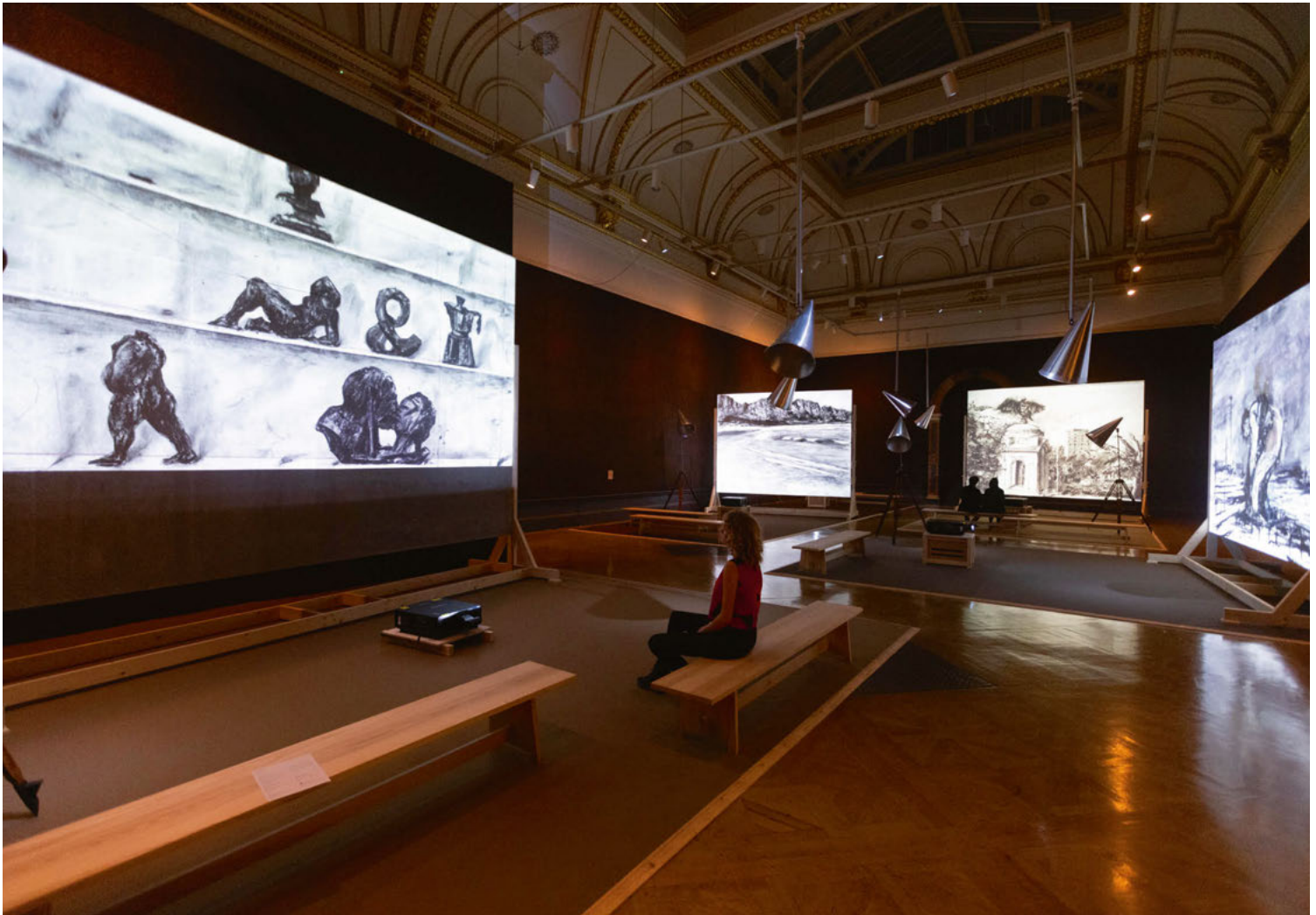
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**Client:** Royal Academy of Arts  
**Lighting Design:** David Atkinson;  
 David Atkinson Lighting Design, UK  
**Lighting Team:** Mark Strange, Michael  
 Lynch, Jason Tuffin, Quentin Jarman,  
 Anita Sidoruk  
**Exhibition Design:** Squatelier, Belgium  
**Graphic Design:** Daly & Lyon, UK  
**Curators:** Adrian Locke with Rose  
 Thompson  
**Exhibition Manager:** Flora Fricker with  
 Belén Lasheras Díaz and Helena Cooper  
**Lighting Suppliers:** Enliten, iGuzzini,  
 Prolights  
**Photography:** Royal Academy of Arts /  
 David Parry

existing framework, using existing fixtures, may have appeared as a challenge to some, Atkinson explained that, due to the nature of the Royal Academy, this didn't present much of a problem. "Although most of the lighting was positioned from the existing, high-level tracks, we had to introduce some additional tracks for some of the exhibits," he said.

"The gallery lighting is well catered for both large and small-scale exhibitions, with a variety of different optics, which did not hinder the lighting approach."

Indeed, the collaborative nature of the project, and DALD's close relationship with the curators and exhibition designers, meant that any potential issues were kept to a minimum.

"A close collaboration with exhibition designer Sabine Theunissen, as well as William Kentridge, during the onsite commissioning stage was key to the success of the lighting. We worked closely with the designer, curators, and exhibition managers throughout the lighting concept and detailed design process too, to accommodate any design changes.

"Through this careful planning with the curators and exhibition managers, it enabled us to avoid any onsite issues. Even with all the best

planning, some of the exhibits did get moved, and by having a well experienced theatrical lighting team, the lighting fixtures were speedily repositioned and focused, keeping the overall lighting design intent intact."

Alongside the stock of iGuzzini fixtures, further Prolight Gallery Eclipse profiles were rented in from Enliten Architectural, where controlled shuttered light was required.

Following the closure of the exhibition at the end of 2022, Atkinson believes that the lighting design achieved the desired "filmatic" effect sought by the artist. "Looking back at the project, I was very happy with the lighting design, and through working closely with William Kentridge and Sabine Theunissen, we achieved the theatrical quality that is evident in Kentridge's work," he said.

"The lighting brings a dynamic depth to the exhibition, with every space feeling very different without uniformity. By varying the lighting approach for each space, it helped to draw the visitors through this large exhibition.

"With the exhibition receiving such acclaim, the lighting was intrinsic to the experience, bringing an invisible support for the amazing works of William Kentridge."

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