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ART IN REVIEW

By **ROBERTA SMITH**

William Kentridge

'Drawings for Projection'

The Drawing Room

40 Wooster Street, near Grand Street

SoHo

Through Feb. 14

William Kentridge, one of the standouts at Documenta X in Kassel, Germany, last summer, may be the Anselm Kiefer of South Africa. In short animated films whose rough-edged charcoal images appear to be drawn, erased and redrawn by an invisible hand, he mulls over his country's complex past, and the scars it has left. Tinged with remorse and violence, haunted by unspecified struggles for power and wealth, these narratives unfold and repeat, erupt and subside, in no particular order, like bad dreams or memories that won't go away.

The two films shown here are among several that Mr. Kentridge made in the mid-1990's when apartheid was being dismantled, each featuring one of two recurring characters.

In "Felix in Exile," a slight man, possibly an intellectual, sits naked in a lonely room that gives way to the desolate expanses of the Rand, the territory west of Johannesburg. In "History of the Main Complaint," Soho Eckstein, a florid, beefy businessman in a pinstripe suit, a stereotypical Afrikaner, lies in a hospital bed attended by clones of himself. The X-rays of his brain repeatedly turn into telephones or adding machines; the bodies of fallen black men bleed, disappear under blowing newspapers and merge with the earth.

Mr. Kentridge's work has the professional finish and formal conservatism of most political animation, which also makes it familiar. But it is still powerful, because of the urgency of its subject and the searingly psychological way it is handled.
ROBERTA SMITH