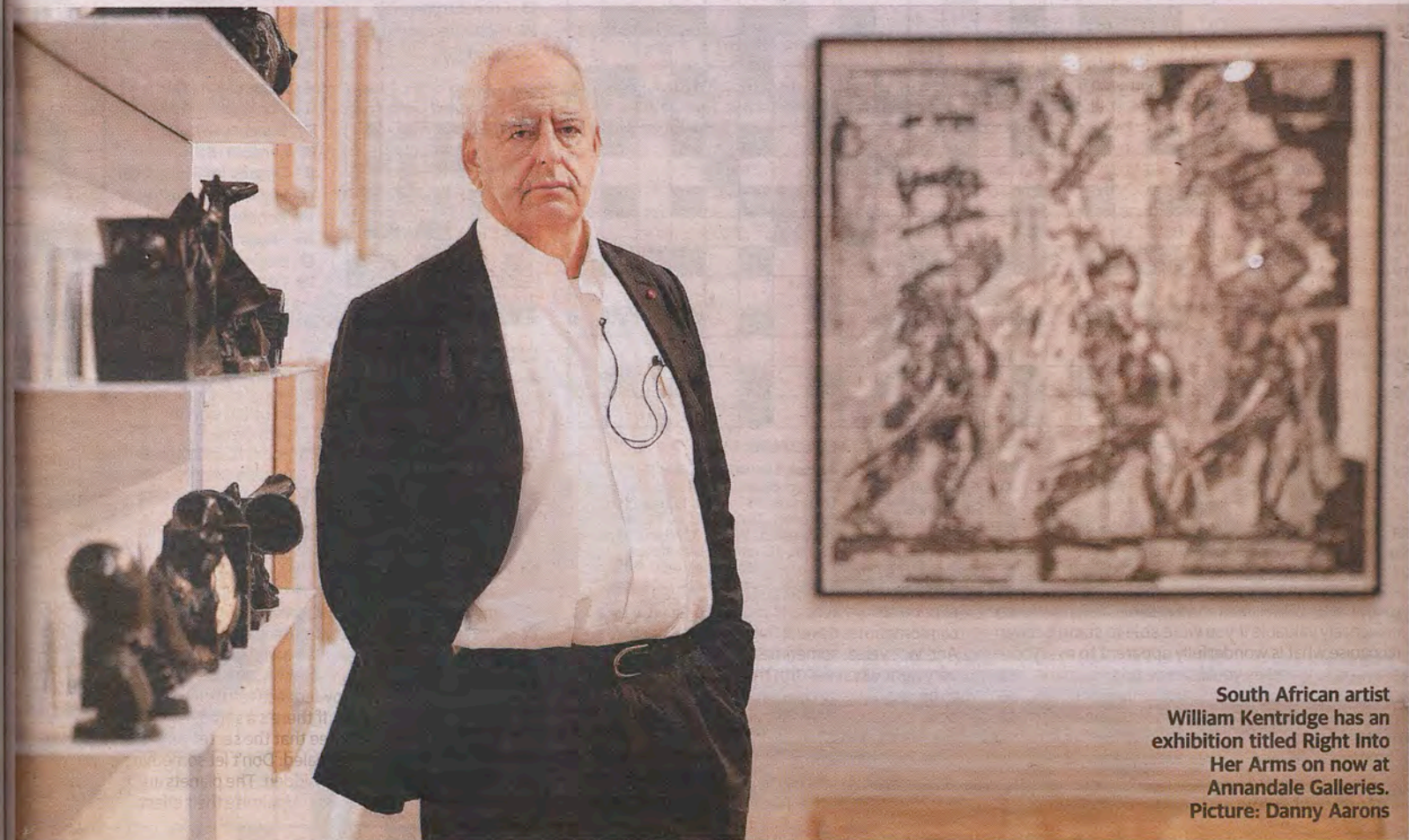


DON'T MISS
A Midnight Visit, an immersive theatrical experience inspired by Edgar Allan Poe, at 655 King St, Newtown until December 9



South African artist William Kentridge has an exhibition titled *Right Into Her Arms* on now at Annandale Galleries. Picture: Danny Aarons

From page to the stage

South African artist revels in 'drawing' opera, writes **Elizabeth Fortescue**

EXHIBITION

The Australian premiere of William Kentridge's production of the opera *Wozzeck* in Sydney in January has audiences in raptures of anticipation.

Yes, opening nights are exciting, Kentridge agrees.

But what he's really looking forward to is the rehearsals for Alban Berg's 1914-1922 tragic opera about a poverty-stricken soldier.

The famous South African artist admits he gets a special charge from being in a creative cocoon with soaring voices and great musicians including Michael Honeyman who will sing the role of *Wozzeck*.

"However good the final production is it can never match the first days' intensity in the small room," Kentridge says.

"When you get on to the stage, there's a distance because it's the orchestra pit between you, and you're watching from an audience perspective to see how it fits together. "So the moments when you're

much closer with the singers are always pretty magical."

By the time Kentridge came to opera fairly recently, he was already famous for the stop-motion animations formed from his visceral charcoal drawings.

Sculpture, tapestry and public art projects are also part of Kentridge's oeuvre, and he continues to experiment. His current show at Annandale Galleries, where he has exhibited for 20 years, includes a mechanical theatre called *Right Into Her Arms*. It combines kinetic elements, Dada-inspired music and projections.

Kentridge says it grew out of the preparatory work for his production of the Berg opera, *Lulu*. The stage model for *Lulu* is also on view at Annandale.

In a prelude to *Wozzeck*, the Annandale show includes six large charcoal drawings which are remnants from Kentridge's

stop-motion animations for the opera. The drawings show bleak battlefields, World War I gas masks, and exploding artillery.

"(*Wozzeck*) is about two things," Kentridge says. "It's obviously about men killing women, still, which from the 1830s until now has not changed so much. And it's about the violence of desperation and poverty, and humiliation by officers of the men."

The Annandale show also includes large-scale woodblock and linoleum prints relating to Kentridge's 2016 mural project where he stencilled scenes from Roman history on to the embankment of the Tiber.

Kentridge is loving opera, which he thinks of as "drawing in four dimensions".

"It's this huge, beautiful canvas you're given to draw on," he says.

In a public Q&A last week with director Michael Brand at the Art Gallery of NSW, where a large exhibition of the artist's works is on view until February 3, 2019, Kentridge explained that he

always paces around his studio before energising himself to make the first mark.

After that, much of the finished work arises out of experimentation in the studio, where surprising results can dictate the artist's next move.

"Almost always, the grand interpretations (of the work) are after the event," he says.

Kentridge says his first view of a film work by Australian artist Tracey Moffatt in the early 1990s was a "revelation". Moffatt's work reversed Kentridge's former view that it was "absurd" to exhibit the film medium as art.

A feature of these films is always the traces of charcoal.

"When I started animation I tried to be so good at erasing," Kentridge says. "But people said, the traces are the interesting thing of what you are doing. It was like this big relief."

William Kentridge: *Right Into Her Arms*, Annandale Galleries, 110 Trafalgar St, Annandale; until December 9, annandalegalleries.com.au