

The Museum of Modern Art

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ANSELM KIEFER

October 16, 1988 - January 3, 1989

Indeed, just as he often identifies his books not by title but by element (ice, sand, earth, fire), he would now refer to paintings by medium, as either straw, lead, or sand. Each has very specific properties when subjected to Kiefer's sacred fire. Straw is reduced to ash; lead is purified; and sand does not burn at all. Each designation, then, is a hallmark for a cluster of related subjects, and becomes a vehicle for Kiefer's explorations of their actual, physical implications.

--Mark Rosenthal, Anselm Kiefer*

The first retrospective of the work of the German contemporary artist Anselm Kiefer concludes its four-city tour at The Museum of Modern Art from October 16, 1988, to January 3, 1989. Organized jointly by The Art Institute of Chicago and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, ANSELM KIEFER introduces to the American public the full achievement of this renowned forty-three-year-old artist. Long celebrated in Europe, with major exhibitions in such cities as London, Paris, Düsseldorf, and Jerusalem, Kiefer's work has only in recent years been seen in the United States.

ANSELM KIEFER has been made possible by major grants from the Ford Motor Company and the Lannan Foundation. The National Endowment for the Arts, the Federal Republic of Germany, and Lufthansa German Airlines have also provided generous support. An indemnity was received from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities. The New York showing has been supported additionally by grants from The Bohen Foundation, the Ford Motor Company, Deutsche Bank, and The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany.

The exhibition includes approximately seventy-five paintings, sculptures, books, photographic pieces, and watercolors. Kiefer's works invoke history and

legend, myth and lore. Mark Rosenthal, who organized the exhibition for the Philadelphia Museum of Art, writes in his essay in the accompanying publication, "He attempts nothing less than an examination and understanding of human civilization, past and present, generally considered through monumental themes of landscape and architecture combined with iconography drawn from literary, cultural, religious, and historical sources. The best of Kiefer's epic elegies to the human condition reverberate with profoundly felt emotions, complex thematic subtlety, and extraordinary surface dynamism."

Anselm Kiefer was born in 1945 in Donaueschingen, Germany. After traveling through Europe from 1963 to 1966, Kiefer returned to Germany to study law and French. He soon turned to the study of art, working under Peter Dreher at the Freiburg Academy and Horst Antes at the Academy in Karlsruhe. The most significant influence in Kiefer's development was the conceptual artist Joseph Beuys, with whom he studied from 1971 to 1973.

In 1969, during several trips abroad, Kiefer took a series of photographs, later known as "Occupations," in which he depicted himself striking the Nazi salute in staged settings. The series signaled the direction his work would take in the following decade: exploring through his art his identity as a German. In confronting the Nazi reality, Kiefer reminds us that the past cannot be erased and that the seeds of fascism, authority, and power are facets found in everyone's psyche to some degree.

While Kiefer's earliest works were concerned with the realm of myth, by 1974 he had made a transition to an increasingly historic, profane human world. The setting of his work likewise shifted from his studio to the landscape. He began to work more in series, examining the various details and characteristics of each theme. As in his earlier conceptual work, Kiefer immersed himself in the more

difficult aspects of his German heritage, depicting disturbing subjects that his audience could not fail to understand. In Ways of World Wisdom (1976-77), for example, he placed pictures of personages from Germany's history along with their names in a schematically rendered forest, surrounded by flames and smoke.

Kiefer's work reached its maturity in the early eighties, when he began to employ an extraordinary variety of materials, including oil, lead, photographs, woodcuts, sand, and straw. The vast scale and complexity of the paintings gave them a forceful presence, and the abstract quality of many of the canvases was highly pronounced. Kiefer had, in effect, integrated the scale and visual richness of Abstract Expressionism with meaningful subject matter; uniting the poles of form and content, the concrete and the ideal, and art and life.

In these later works, Kiefer gradually turned from the land and made architecture his primary setting. He appropriated designs for Nazi architecture to create memorials to various personages. In Interior (1981), he faithfully depicts a building designed by Albert Speer. However, the light-filled space has been darkened with black fragments of woodcuts, including one depicting a fire. The artist also continued to evoke mythic events and dramatic transitions in historical time. Following a 1984 trip to Israel, he used the story of the Exodus as an archetypal experience fundamental to all people. Other major works from Kiefer's mature period included in the exhibition are To the Unknown Painter (1982), Wayland's Song (1982), Shulamite (1983), The Book (1979-85), and Osiris and Isis (1985-87).

In addition to his painting, Kiefer has created illustrated books that recall the medieval German tradition of hand-illuminated manuscripts. These volumes are not based on written texts, but are purely visual expressions in which he serially develops a theme. Starting with photographs, Kiefer would

often elaborate on them, applying paint or other materials or gluing additional photographs to the images.

ANSELM KIEFER was organized by the late A. James Speyer, curator of Twentieth Century Painting and Sculpture, The Art Institute of Chicago, and by Mark Rosenthal, curator of Twentieth-Century Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art. The exhibition has been coordinated for The Museum of Modern Art by Kynaston McShine, senior curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture. The exhibition opened in Chicago in December 1987, followed by showings at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

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LECTURES: Tuesday, October 18, at 8:30 p.m.

John Hallmark Neff
Director of the Art Program, First National Bank of Chicago
"Reading Kiefer: What We See, What We Know, What It Means"

Tuesday, October 25, at 8:30 p.m.

Andreas Huysen
Chairman of the German Department, Columbia University
"Anselm Kiefer: The Temptation of Myth and the Terror of History"

Tickets for each lecture are \$8, members \$7, students \$5, and are available in advance at the Museum's lobby information desk or by sending payment with a stamped, self-addressed envelope to the Department of Education, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY 10019.

*PUBLICATION: Anselm Kiefer by Mark Rosenthal. 17 full-bleed, double-page photographic images by Anselm Kiefer, entitled The Passage through the Red Sea. 216 pages. 280 illustrations, with 105 color and 2 foldouts. Published by The Art Institute of Chicago and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Paperbound, \$29.95. Trade edition Prestel Publishers, distributed by Te Neues Publishing Company, New York.

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