



ANSELM KIEFER

APERIATUR TERRA: RECENT WORK

ART
GALLERY
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ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

19 MAY – 29 JULY 2007



ANSELM KIEFER

DONAUESCHINGEN / GERMANY b1945

Lives and works in Barjac, France

Anselm Kiefer is regarded as one of the most important and influential artists working today. In 2007 he will have major one-person exhibitions at the Guggenheim, Bilbao and the Grand Palais, Paris. This exhibition is his first one-man show in Australia and the first time the public will experience the epic scope of his work.

Born in 1945 in southern Germany, Anselm Kiefer has lived and worked in Barjac in the south of France since 1991. The works in the exhibition reflect the themes currently evolving in Kiefer's Barjac studio and have been selected by the Art Gallery of New South Wales in collaboration with the White Cube Gallery, London.

This deeply stirring exhibition includes new works inspired by the Catholic liturgy for Advent and Palm Sunday. Inscribed with text from the Old Testament prophet, Isaiah, multiple assemblages of palms and other plants under glass cover the entire gallery wall. They look like the pages of a revelatory book. A living twelve-metre palm tree lies on the gallery floor, in historian Simon Schama's words, "like an outside quill".

The palm was known as an immortal tree (shedding and regrowing) and so this suite of works plays out the Passion (death) and the Resurrection (regeneration) of Christ. Kiefer has been accumulating materials and objects found on his travels – dried plants, clay vessels, mud and a mass of tangled thorns from Morocco – not just to represent ideas, but to re-enact the creation.

The second body of work consists of vast, crusty landscapes and skiescapes. These panoramic scenes that run all the way to the horizon are, at first sight, a return to the charred and fissured landscapes of his earlier periods. Yet there is a clear link to the Palm Sunday theme of regeneration with a blazing shower of poppies strewn across the foreground of each canvas, running counter to the frozen crests of greenish-black paint. On show also will be the four major works by Anselm Kiefer held in the Gallery's collection: *Glaube Hoffnung*,

Liebe (Faith, Hope, Love) 1984-86, and *The Women of Antiquity: Hypatia, Candidia, Myrtis* 2002; and the two more recent acquisitions that share the same title: *Von den Verlorenen gerührt, die der Glaube nicht trug, erwachen die Trommeln im Fluss* ("The drums in the river came alive, beaten by the lost ones, who were not supported by faith").

One is a characteristic landscape with a broken concrete stairway. Monumental, it crosses the boundaries between painting and sculpture. Made in 2004 the steps alone weigh three and a half tonnes, yet they seem to hover effortlessly over the horizon. There are dreams of transcendence, here as in *Glaube Hoffnung*, *Liebe* with its lead propeller, dreams that can never be realised. Are the stairs floating towards the sky or do you feel they are on the verge of tipping back to earth?

The other new acquisition with the same title, was a gift from Kiefer to the Gallery. This 2005 work complements the stairs; a large pile of glass fragments is scattered over a skein of human hair. Each shard bears the astronomical number of a heavenly body. The vessels were shattered, according to the Kabbala, when the creation was still new. God returned with an outpouring of mercy but creation was not yet strong enough to absorb his mercy and this caused the shattering. While the broken stairs promise the possibility of ascension from the world to heaven, this complimentary installation suggests God's outpouring of light into his creation.

COMMENTARY

Kiefer in the studio

Anselm Kiefer has an immense energy and unquenchable ambition for the scale and imagination of his work. Much of this energy has always gone into the places he has lived because it is hard to separate his life from his art. Since 1991 he has lived and worked in the south of France in an old silk factory which he has renovated simply and in keeping with its original structure. The surrounding landscape however is dotted with new structures which act as studios and as permanent sites for his work.



APERIATUR TERRA ET GERMINAT SALVATOREM... RORATE CAELI DESUPER, ET PLUANT IUSTUM
"LET THE EARTH OPEN AND BRING FORTH A SAVIOUR LET THE CLOUDS ABOVE RAIN DOWN JUSTICE ON THE EARTH."

FROM THE CATHOLIC LITURGY FOR PALM SUNDAY AND ALSO FOR ADVENT; ISAIAH 45.8, WHICH INSPIRED THE NEW BODY OF WORK FOR THIS EXHIBITION

Kiefer's working method includes travelling and collecting. Large areas of his studios have always been set aside for storing plants and natural objects collected on his journeys to remote places. He has a great library with many antique and rare books that include botanical and herbal treatises and other, more esoteric subjects. Like his mentor Joseph Beuys he has a genuine and abiding interest in nature but also studies how natural substances behave and interact with the human body. His investigations include works drawn from Greco-Roman history and mythology, Kabbalistic mysticism and old Gnostic texts. More recently he has built a dialogue through his work between the things that grow and crawl on the earth and the heavenly bodies, inspired by the writings of the 16th/17th century English philosopher Robert Fludd.

Kiefer is well known for generating complex overlapping readings by using images from mythology and mystical texts. Sometimes he associates creation mythologies with the creative process of the artist. He has often spoken of art as a journey into uncharted territory. It is his hope that we the viewers will gladly embark on equally uncertain journeys in our appreciation of the work, bringing our own emotional and intellectual baggage to interact with the multi-layering he provides in text, image and the extraordinary material qualities of the objects he creates.

Kiefer often works in series, sometimes giving the works a generic title. In his extraordinary studio he may have several bodies of work running in parallel and inevitably the themes of the work intertwine or overlap. In between these vastly productive bursts of creativity Kiefer often enters a very risky experimental phase, trying out ideas that are technically improbable. He refuses to follow any of the rules that normally govern painting and sculpture because these might limit his imagination. The application of objects to landscape painting and the use of other contradictory layers of spatial representation defy conventions and yet these are some of his most breathtaking successes.

During these experimental phases the bulk of his output remains unresolved and may be set aside to be recycled years later. Kiefer has a vast collection of found objects

and half-finished works that eventually combine to bring forth new works; sometimes it takes a very long time. Paintings that are unresolved are set aside until some found object comes along to complete or set them going again. For example, he created a lake in the valley below his main studio and in moving the soil to the top of the hill he created a vast mound that was contained by a 15 metre-high retaining wall of thick concrete. He then realised he had half of the structure for a new cathedral-like studio space where he could install larger works such as the great *Saltpetriere* panels and more recently, inevitably, new 15 metre-high paintings! In the process of forming the mound and related structures Kiefer took the opportunity to create dark, underground spaces. You can walk between his growing number of structures underground, coming up from time to time into cathedral-like spaces glowing with Provençal light. Every visit entails a journey with Persephone between Hades and perpetual light.

Because of all this building activity the studio often has concrete mixers coming and going, and Kiefer has made the most of this by diverting much of it into art. He has had formwork created to cast many sets of concrete steps, two sections of which make up part of our new painting. Down the hill he has cast an upside down house and now he is making building modules by casting the insides of shipping containers. Using these modules he has made a great inverted ziggurat adjacent to the large studio with openings that lead to underground tunnels and atmospheric chambers. In the landscape he has constructed a ruined city of teetering towers sometimes topped by large lead battleships. Kiefer has often used the phrase "And the grass will cover your cities" in his works. It has an apocalyptic ring to it but it is also in a way a hopeful affirmation that nature always survives and consumes civilisation.

Most of what Kiefer is doing in his studio in France will never find its way into a gallery or a collection; we can only hope it might survive him by becoming a permanent foundation in situ. Some people are offended by the sheer scale of his project but it can also be considered life-affirming in an age with little vision, little generosity and not a lot of humour.



Kiefer's studio in France
Photography: Tony Bond



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- Anselm Kiefer: Works on Paper in The Metropolitan Museum of Art www.metmuseum.org/explore/KIEFER/Home.htm
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- *Anselm Kiefer – Heaven and Earth* at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden: www.hirshhorn.si.edu/Kiefer
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- This printed education kit is also available online: www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/ed/kit

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From left to right

Glaube, Hoffnung, Liebe 1984–86
 emulsion, synthetic polymer paint,
 shellac on photodocument paper on
 canvas (linen) with lead
 280 x 380 x 75cm
 Mervyn Horton Bequest Fund 1987
 Collection: AGNSW

**Women of antiquity, Myrtis,
 Hypatia, Candidia** 2002
 various media
 dimensions variable
 Collection: AGNSW

**Von den Verlorenen gerührt, die
 der Glaube nicht trug, erwachen
 die Trommeln im Fluss** 2004
 oil, emulsion, acrylic and sand on
 canvas with concrete staircase
 420 x 560cm
 Purchased with funds provided by
 Geoff and Vicki Ainsworth and
 Catriona and Simon Mordant 2006
 Collection: AGNSW

**Von den Verlorenen gerührt, die
 der Glaube nicht trug, erwachen
 die Trommeln im Fluss** 2005
 glass and hair, dimensions variable
 Gift of the artist 2006
 Collection: AGNSW

Overleaf:

**Aperiatur terra et germinet
 salvatorem** 2006
 mixed media
 Zabludowicz Collection

Die Nachricht vom Fall Trojas 2006
 mixed media
 Alberto Cortina, Spain

**Rorate Caeli desuper et nubes
 pluunt iustum** 2006
 mixed media
 Rennie Collection, Vancouver,
 Canada

Palmsonntag 2006
 mixed media
 Loaned on behalf of the Trustees for
 Guy and Marion Naggar

All works © Anselm Kiefer, courtesy
 White Cube Gallery





WE NEVER ATTAIN OUR GOAL. NO ARTIST WILL EVER REACH HIS GOAL. BUT WE CANNOT DO WITHOUT ONE. WE ARE CONSTANTLY REACHING OUT FOR A GOAL BEFORE OUR EYES, MAKING A PLAN YET KNOWING THAT IT WILL NOT BE PERFORMED AS DEVISED. WITHOUT A PLAN WE COULD DO NOTHING. BUT WHILE PLANNING WE KNOW WELL THAT IT IS A SENSELESS PLAN AND WILL NEVER COME TO FRUITION.

ANSELM KIEFER BOUNDARIES, TRACKS, TRACES, SONGS, A PAPER PRESENTED AT ADELAIDE FESTIVAL 1992

K-6 LOOKING AND MAKING

MATERIALS AND PROCESS

VISUAL ART

Look closely at Kiefer's artworks. List the range of materials he uses in his art-making. Do the materials surprise you? Why? Are his artworks paintings or sculptures? Describe their surface qualities and the range of colours he uses. What do they remind you of? Imagine you could step into one of his artworks. What sounds would you hear? What would it smell like?

Consider the scale of his works. How do they make you feel? How do you have to place yourself to view the works? Can you experience the whole work at one time? Discuss how they are made and how they are hung in the Gallery. What difficulties might the Gallery have experienced when installing the artworks?

Look at the individual panels of *Palm Sunday*. Discuss what you see and the layers of different materials Kiefer has used. Experiment with thick paint and layer earthy colours onto paper. Allow the paint to dry in the sun and let the surface crack. Once dry, add some dryer paint by flicking it onto the surface with the bristles of a brush. Collect leaves, flowers, seeds and grasses. Mix plaster of Paris and dip your organic samples into it and allow it to set. Stick them onto your background, considering carefully their placement. Discuss words that can be used to describe your artworks, or the names of your samples and scratch or write your favourite one into the background. Display your class results together and critique.

Dip some paper or card into some mud and allow it to dry. Sprinkle powder paint or chalk/charcoal onto the surface of the mud. Add twigs, leaves, flowers or seeds and then encase your artwork in clear contact paper.

ENGLISH

Create a word bank to describe the textures and surface qualities of Kiefer's artworks. Compare your class results and choose your favourite words. Kiefer often uses poetry and stories to influence his art-making. Using the list of your favourite descriptive words, write a poem to describe one of Kiefer's artworks.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Kiefer often uses lead in his artworks. Where does lead come from? Research the qualities of lead and why they might appeal to Kiefer. What are the more dangerous properties of lead and how would Kiefer have to protect himself? Find out what other art forms use lead and in what way.

JOURNEYS

VISUAL ART

The theme of journeys is a key element in Kiefer's art-making: journeys from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven, across the land, adventures along the way, difficulties encountered and rough terrain. Look closely at the artwork with the staircase, *Von den Verlorenen gerührt, "die der Glaube nicht trug, erwachen die Trommeln im Fluss"* 2004. Is the staircase leading you up or down? What is it crossing? Where are you going? Imagine what you will find there, when you reach your destination.

Compare this work with the shards of glass in *Von den Verlorenen gerührt, die der Glaube nicht trug, erwachen die Trommeln im Fluss* 2005. Each piece of glass bears the astronomical number of a star. Why do you think they are shattered over the gallery floor? Which artwork do you think depicts the journey from heaven to earth and vice versa? Give reasons for your answer.

ENGLISH

Invent a story about where the staircase is going. Research other stories and tales where characters cross, or go through, or up or down something to journey to another place. Choose your favourite one and read the story in class. Discuss the characters' journeys and consider how you might depict their stories as an artwork.

HSIE

Palm Sunday marks the beginning of one of the most famous journeys. Find out more about this journey, Palm Sunday and how different Christian denominations religions mark this event. Can you spot any symbols or materials from these events in Kiefer's artworks?



above: *Rorate Caeli desuper et nubes pluant iustum* 2006
 left: *Aperiat terra et germinet salvatorem* 2006

FOR VISUAL DRAMA THAT WILL HAUNT YOUR DREAMS THERE'S NO-ONE ALIVE TO BEAT ANSELM KIEFER. THIS IS BECAUSE, ALONG WITH BEING A PHILOSOPHER-POET, HE ALSO HAPPENS TO BE A CRAFTSMAN OF PHENOMENAL POWER AND VERSATILITY.

SIMON SCHAMA, HISTORIAN, THE GUARDIAN

MYTHS AND STORIES

VISUAL ART

Kiefer is well known for using myths and stories as a starting point when creating artworks. **Examine** the artwork, *Women of Antiquity: Hypatia, Candida, Myrtis* 2004. **Walk** around the sculptures and describe what you see. **Look** closely at their surface, shape and colours. What do they remind you of? What materials do you think Kiefer used to make them? **Consider** their size. How do they make you feel?

Imagine what the faces of these women would look like and draw your ideas. **Choose** a person, either known to you or from a myth or story, who could be considered a hero or heroine. **List** their physical qualities and the characteristics of their personality. **Design** and make a sculpture to represent your hero or heroine's qualities through the use of objects and symbols as well as recognisable shapes or forms.

Kiefer continues the theme of "Women from Antiquity" in his artwork *Nachricht vom Fall Trojas* 2006. In this work he shows the beacons lit by Agamemnon to let his wife Clytemnestra know about the Fall of Troy. Can you see the horizon line in this work? What is the weather like? How has Kiefer depicted the beacons? **Look** at this work up close and then from further away. How does your viewpoint change? Do they remind you of any other artworks you have seen in the Gallery?

Use a range of drawing materials to create your own landscape painting or drawing where the surface quality of the land and soil underfoot is the main focus of attention. **Think** carefully about the colours you use and the size of the marks you make.

MATHS

Consider the horizon line in Kiefer's landscapes. **Calculate** the proportion of land to sky. What effect does this have on the viewer? **Use** a photocopy of *Die Nachricht vom Fall Trojas* and locate the vanishing point in this landscape. **Trace** the lines back to the vanishing point from each of the beacon sites.

HSIE

Investigate who Hypatia, Candida and Myrtis were and what myths and stories about them Kiefer is referring to. Do you agree with the objects he has chosen to replace their heads as symbols of their plight? What other objects could he have chosen?

Research the Battle of Troy and who the main characters in this legend were. Why do you think Kiefer chose this legend? What other familiar symbol is associated with the Fall of Troy? Why? Kiefer lists the names of the ports along the Aegean coast to trace Agamemnon's journey home. **Locate** some of them on a map.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Use myVirtualGallery on the Gallery's website www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/ed/myvirtualgallery
Curate your own exhibition about Kiefer using the four artworks in the gallery's collection. Write wall panels to accompany your choice of artworks, either as descriptions of the materials and techniques used or to tell the stories behind them.



above: Die Nachricht vom Fall Trojas 2006
right: Palmsonntag 2006

HIS CHOICE OF MATERIALS AND PROCESSES EMBODIES AN ALLEGORICAL APPROACH TO PAINTING AND PHOTOGRAPHY AS ASPECTS OF THE IDEA RATHER THAN NEUTRAL MEANS FOR RENDERING AN IMAGE. WHEN HE USES PHOTOGRAPHY IS NOT JUST A WAY OF GATHERING IMAGERY BUT IT IS USED FOR ITS INDEXICAL RELATIONSHIP TO MEMORY.

TONY BOND

7-12 FRAMING QUESTIONS

Observe the *Anselm Kiefer* exhibition closely. Consider the art practice of Anselm Kiefer. Select and respond to a number of his artworks. List key words that best describe your first encounter with them. Outline why you chose these words based on your observations. Would you define his **art practice** within traditional categories such as painting, sculpture, collage, or installation? Consider if the artist has blurred or pushed the boundaries of these definitions. Evaluate the **sites and spaces** the artworks are located in. Propose other possible locations outside the Gallery and how it would affect the experience of the exhibition. Assess how the **presentation of the artworks** plays a significant role in the way the audience responds to Kiefer's art practice.

Respond to the **physicality** of these art objects and their **relationship to the viewer**, focusing on their scale, weight and surface. Engage with them from a variety of distances, from extreme close up to far away. Define your varying physical and emotional experiences from these differing proximities. Is this a confrontational or comforting, overwhelming or exciting sensation for you? Investigate the response of others in comparison to your own encounter with the work. Discuss how Kiefer plays with these physical qualities to generate shifting perceptions of space, from the **micro to the macro**, within his works.

Kiefer has said *"no viewer ever sees the work the same way as the artist does"*. Consider this quote. Discuss how differing audience viewpoints can enhance the meaning of an artwork. Respond to Kiefer's view on the **role of the audience**. Judge whether Kiefer sees this as an important aspect of his art-making. Propose whether he considers this an active or passive relationship with his art. Investigate how and why seeing the same artwork can stimulate different responses in different viewers.

Identify and define as many **materials** used by Kiefer as possible. Create an inventory list of them. Categorise them as organic or inorganic, natural or manufactured. Which, if any, reoccur across multiple works? Could

these be considered 'traditional' art materials? In what contexts might these materials be more commonly found and for what purpose? Investigate **associations and meanings** each of these materials may conjure independently of the artwork in which they are found. Consider how this can activate the understandings of the artwork for the viewer. Consider whether Kiefer would be conscious of this when selecting materials.

Examine Kiefer's use of key materials as both **subject and object** in his works. Locate an example of a material that conveys the idea of something and its actual physical presence simultaneously. Is this a key Kiefer strategy? Discuss. Lead is a signature material that appears many times, either as a raw material or transformed into significant objects. Research the opposing qualities of this material (it is very heavy yet easily malleable, poisonous yet protects from radiation) and its historical link to alchemical philosophies. Speculate on why it has become integral to Kiefer's **material and conceptual practice**.

Define Kiefer's **art-making process**. Is it evident on the exhibited artworks? Discuss how adding and layering materials, then reducing and stripping them back, leaves a trace of the creative process. In this way, Kiefer's work has been said to resemble archaeological excavation sites or ancient artefacts. Discuss how the artist's manipulation of materials contributes to his visual language and this reading. Select one artwork and note all the marks that suggest how it was made. Imagine this process and outline it step by step, from its beginnings in the studio to its final presentation in this gallery space. Propose the tools and equipment he may have used. Would they be considered conventional in the artworld? Discuss if Kiefer's practice could be considered as much industrial as artistic. Research information about **Kiefer's studio**, its location and set-up. Discuss how the artist has developed a space that informs his art-making process? Kiefer's studio is often considered an artwork in its own right, with his exhibited works thought of as pieces that break of the edges of the larger work. Discuss.



ANSELM KIEFER KNOWS THAT HIS WAY OF LIFE AND HIS ART IS CRAZILY AMBITIOUS AND HE OFTEN MAKES JOKES AT HIS OWN EXPENSE. LIKE MARCEL DUCHAMP, JOSEPH BEUYS AND YVES KLIEN, KIEFER LOVES LIFE AND LAUGHTER. HIS PROJECT IS PASSIONATELY SERIOUS AND HILARIOUS AT THE SAME TIME.

TONY BOND, HEAD CURATOR INTERNATIONAL ART, ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES, LOOK MAGAZINE MAY 07

Investigate the role of **text and language** in Kiefer's practice. Can you read what is inscribed on his artworks? What language is used? Speak the words aloud and sound them out. Consider if words can offer other forms of information beyond their written meaning. Examine how the visual or aural qualities of the words may contribute to expanded experiences of the work. Kiefer has always had an interest in **books** as both informative objects and aesthetic forms within his art making. Suggest how this interest relates to the way he incorporates letters, words and sentences into the visual language of his body of work. Locate an English translation of the texts, are they original pieces of writing or from other sources? Investigate if the text on one work may link to or bear a relationship with that on another. Consider why they are also the titles of artwork and how this contributes to possible but not definite meanings for the audience.

The **landscape** is a persistent setting which Kiefer's artworks are built around. Examine how these can be read as zones of **transition, transformation and change** – either on the verge of degradation or regeneration. Discuss how you would characterise these environments: are they battlefields or agricultural fields? Discuss how humans act upon these types of fields and for what ends. Investigate the formal elements used to amplify the mood and tone of these ambiguous states of landscape. How does your analysis affect the reading of these works and the artist's aims? Is Kiefer a pessimist or an optimist?

Consider the position of the **horizon line** that occurs in many of the works. Describe its placement and how it creates two key zones in the composition. What visual perspectives are being presented: an elevated or aerial perspective or both? Discuss what a horizon line

demarcates physically in a landscape but also metaphorically in the traditions of landscape painting. Consider how the incorporation of key **signs and symbols**, such as a propeller, stairs, meteors, flowers, palm tree, trace lines, stars and fire, contribute to a conceptual reading of Kiefer's practice as one of journeys, pathways and passages between this world and another. In what way can these themes also be a metaphor for the creative process of the artist? Debate.

Investigate the importance of **myths, traditions and histories** in Kiefer's body of work. Define the key myths and their sources used in this latest body of work including *Palm Sunday* and the story of the *Fall of Troy*. Judge whether these can be read in a clear, linear **narrative** or if there is a sense of an indirect, layered, multiple perspective at play. Suggest how this is approach is also reflected in Kiefer's material practice. Discuss what can be learnt from myths, traditions and histories. How can their meanings change over time and have influence on other cultures from which they did not originate? Investigate why this may be of interest to Kiefer.

Is there a sense of definite **time, place and culture** in Kiefer's work? Assess if his work is related to the past or could also be suggesting something of the present and future. Discuss the ways his aesthetic can at once seem antique and futuristic. In doing so, consider Kiefer's personal and cultural experiences as a German including the influence of artist and mentor **Joseph Beuys** and his awareness of the practice of **Marcel Duchamp** and **Yves Klien**. Identify within Kiefer's body of work how they have shaped Kiefer's perception of, and interaction with the world.