

# ANSELM KIEFER

16 DECEMBER 2015 – 18 APRIL 2016

Anselm Kiefer erupted onto the German art scene in 1969 by addressing the history of the second World War with a series of controversial works, dispelling the collective amnesia that prevailed in the country. Since then, Kiefer's prolific production has borne the mark of boundlessness, not only in its monumentality and in the power of its materiality, but also in the infinite wealth of sources on which it draws in its quest to plumb the depths of memory and the past. With its 150 works, this exhibition at the Centre Pompidou – Kiefer's first retrospective in France – offers an immersion in the titanic yet profoundly reflective universe of his art.

Organised in chronologically arranged thematic sections, the works reveal the obsessional effort of this artist, born in 1945, to develop a new language both poetic and cathartic, steeped in German culture, in universal history, in mysticism and philosophy. Kiefer adduces the work of poets, thinkers and writers – from Ingeborg Bachmann to Heidegger to Genet – in his own paintings, books and vitrines, using citation as a link between times past and present. His poetics of ruin is elaborated in paint, clay, plant materials, ash and lead, this last the alchemical substance par excellence that reflects both the melancholy at the heart of Kiefer's creative process and his faith in ultimate renewal.

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## SELECTED WORKS, IN ORDER OF VIEWING

### ***Mann im Wald* [Man in the Forest], 1971**

Private collection, San Francisco

In this self-portrait, the artist depicts himself in the midst of a forest. Recalling the Teutoburg Forest, site in 9 AD of a legendary battle between the Romans and the Germanic chieftain Arminius, the woodland world has been taken as a symbol of the German national spirit. The flame is ambiguous: does it embody the desire for purification, or is it a manifestation of the artist's creative power?

### ***Für Jean Genet* [For Jean Genet], 1969**

Hall Collection

For Kiefer, books offer an opportunity to combine different materials. Here he makes use of photographs of the "Occupations" series in which he re-enacted the Nazi salute, by then an illegal gesture, and blurred the boundary between art and life in using his body as a means of reengagement with history. Struggling against the repression of memory, he was investigating what it was to be German: "I just wanted to know who I was, where I was coming from, and Nazism was the most recent past".

### ***Malen* [To Paint], 1974**

Private collection

In associating the motif of the palette with that of the landscape, understood as the visual expression of a state of mind, Kiefer explores the role of the artist after Nazism. The bluish rain given off by the palette will revive the burnt and ravaged field, scarred by a destructive history. Kiefer demonstrates art's power to sublimate the catastrophic and so to salvage something from the wreckage.

### ***Notung*, 1973**

Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam

Here Kiefer's attic studio that he moved into in 1971 is transformed into a theatre in which the main character is Siegfried's broken and reforged sword from the *Song of the Nibelungs*, the Nordic epic that inspired the Wagner opera, a work Hitler adored. Here Kiefer suggests his

fascination with the Germanic heroes who help constitute the national identity, godlike yet fallible: is the sword not stained with blood?

### ***Varus*, 1976**

Collection Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven

It is through a bloodied and defeated landscape that Kiefer evokes Varus, the Roman governor of Germania who in 9 AD lost his entire army at the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest, defeated by Arminius – Hermann – "first defender of the German homeland". This painting of silence and mourning reveals the process by which the story of that Germanic warrior is turned to patriotic ends, as Kiefer inscribes among the branches the names of poets and scholars who elaborated on the legend, the painter thus offering a vision of a Germany whose culture is founded on an originary catastrophe.

### ***Margarethe*, 1981**

The Doris and Donald Fisher Collection  
at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

Kiefer takes his *Margarethe* from Paul Celan, whose poem *Todesfuge* was written on the liberation of the concentration camps: "Your golden hair Margarete / your ashen hair Sulamith we dig a grave in the breezes there one lies unconfined". The pale straw that forms the glowing candles evokes the "Aryan woman", whereas Sulamith opposingly incarnates the "Jewish woman". Here again, the German landscape embodied in the bundled straw is both figure and symbol of a prosperous nation.

### **The Alchemy of Glass: Vitrines**

For these vitrines, specially created for the present exhibition, the artist drew on the underground tunnels of Barjac and his studio in Croissy, where he stores a carefully labelled collection of objects and materials, a kind of encyclopaedia of the living world.

(See Room of vitrines – A Little Lexicon)

### ***Seraphim*, 1983-1984**

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,  
purchased with funds contributed  
by Mr. and Mrs. Andrew M. Saul, 1984

Rung by rung a seraph climbs a Jacob's ladder that rises from Earth to the gates of Heaven.

An allusion to Jewish religious belief, it attests to the artist's interest in the Hebrew scriptures and the Talmud following his visits to Israel in 1984 and 1990. Kiefer exploits the double meaning of the Hebrew word, a seraph being either a serpent sent by god whose bite killed many of the ancient Hebrews, or an angel, whose black wings here become increasingly immaterial as they ascend, to finally fade into the endless skies.

***Für Paul Celan : Aschenblume***

**[For Paul Celan: Ash Flower], 2006**

**Private collection**

The words of poet Paul Celan haunt Kiefer's work. The artist's omnipresent citations serve as an instrument of memory, uniting past and present. The ash colour of the landscape and the burnt books echo the sound qualities of Celan's poetry as he strove to remake the German language after the catastrophe of the camps, while the painting also evokes the prediction of 19th century poet Heinrich Heine: "Where they burn books, they will end up burning human beings as well."

***Osiris et Isis, 1985-1987***

**San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, purchase through a gift of Jean Stein by exchange, the Mrs. Paul L. Wattis Fund, and the Doris and Donald Fisher Fund**

This ruined pyramid owes as much to the Augusteum in Samaria as it does to ancient Egypt. A tomb of memory, it evokes death and resurrection through the allusion to Osiris, whose body was torn to pieces and scattered along the Nile. The pieces of broken ceramic refer to this fragmented body and to the *tzimtzum* of kabbalist Isaac Luria, who understood the world to consist of the shattered detritus of divinity.

***Shebirat ha kelim***

**[The Breaking of the Vessels], 1990**

**Grothe Collection, Kunsthalle Mannheim**

This work evokes an episode from the Kabbala of Isaac Luria: the breaking of the ten sephirot making up the Tree of Life – whose names are inscribed on the pockets of the tunic – by the force of the emanation of God's light, a radiance embodied in the fractured crown.

This cosmic transformation the artist renders in lead, glass, hair, fabric and ash.

***Böse Blumen, 2001-2015***

**Private collection**

Painted on a photograph, the multicoloured wild flowers and grasses escape the frame of the picture. Kiefer's references are multiple: to Van Gogh and his sunflowers, to Rimbaud's poem *Le Dormeur du val*, and further to Baudelaire's "luminous and serene fields" whose ease and freedom are contradicted by the title, which means bad or evil flowers. Matter, as living, becomes the site of regeneration, of the transformation of Being.

***Mme de Staël – De l'Allemagne, 2015***

**Private collection**

In 2015, Kiefer returned to the theme of the German forest, approached now not as myth but as a place of rebirth. In this truncated landscape with its radiant light, Kiefer both pays homage to Romanticism and casts a detached eye on the country of his birth. He aligns himself in fact with Madame de Staël who in 1813 published her essay *De l'Allemagne* [Germany], sketching a portrait of German culture and encouraging her compatriots to find new inspiration guided by emotion.

**You are invited to continue your visit in the Forum – 1, where until 29 February you will find Kiefer's monumental work: *Steigend, steigend, sinke nieder* [In climbing, climbing towards the heights, fall into the abyss].**

# ROOM OF VITRINES A LITTLE LEXICON

## Saturn-Zeit

The Time of Saturn

A reference to the planet Saturn's revolution around the sun, which takes 29 years. Saturn was also a Roman god associated with time, astrology and melancholy.

## Luftwurzel

Aerial root

## Mathäus 3.9

### Ich kann aus diesen Steinen Kinder Abrahams machen

For I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham

Matthew 3:9. In quoting these words, Kiefer has replaced the word "God" with the first person singular.

## Hexenwaage

Witch scales

An allusion to the practice in 16th century Northern Europe of weighing women suspected to be witches.

## Das Ende der Geschichte

The End of History

## Ouroboros

An ancient symbol depicting a serpent or dragon biting its own tail, representing a self-enclosed cycle, often taken as a symbol for time or eternity.

## Das Spiel ist aus

The Game is Over

A reference to the title of a poem by Ingeborg Bachmann.

## Manna

In the Book of Exodus, the food from heaven that relieves the hunger of the Israelites in the desert.

## Philemon + Baucis

In his *Metamorphoses*, Ovid tells the mythic tale of Philemon and Baucis, a poor Phrygian couple who offer hospitality to Zeus and Hermes.

## Daphné

In Ovid's telling of the myth, Daphne (whose name means "laurel") is a nymph of great beauty who is turned into a laurel rose so that she may escape the advances of Apollo.

## Der verlorene Buchstabe

The missing letter

According to the scholar Gershom Scholem (1897-1982), an authority of the kabbalah, the original divine alphabet on which the Torah is based had 23 letters, one of which has become invisible; the day the missing letter reappears, the evils of the world will come to an end.

## Die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis

The Terrors of Ice and Darkness

A novel written by the Austrian author Christoph Ransmayr in 1984.

## Heimdall

God of Scandinavian mythology. Guardian of the rainbow bridge Bifröst between Ásgard, realm of the gods, and the terrestrial world.

## Die eiserne Schlange

The Bronze Serpent

In the *Book of Numbers*, after afflicting the people of Israel with a plague of fiery serpents, Yahweh says to Moses: "Make you a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole: and ... everyone who is bitten, when he looks on it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of bronze..."

## Ragnarök

In Norse mythology, an account of the coming end of the world, popularised by Richard Wagner in his opera *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

## Von den Verlorenen gerührt, die der Glaube nicht trug, erwachen die Trommeln im Fluss

Struck by the lost unsupported by faith, the drums in the river awoke

These are words from Ingeborg Bachmann's poem *Die Brücken* [The Bridges], published in 1953.

## Valentinus

Born in Egypt in the 2nd century AD, Valentinus was one of the most important of Gnostic teachers, declared a heretic by the Church.

## Raphaël la belle jardinière

A reference to Raphael's *Madonna and Child with Saint John the Baptist* in the Louvre.

## Traigo todas las Indias en mi mano

I bear all the Indies in my hand

Is a line from Francisco de Quevedo's sonnet Lisi's *Portrait Carried in a Ring*, written in the early 17th century.

## Hortus conclusus

A garden enclosed

From the Vulgate Latin of *Song of Songs* 4:12. In the religious art and mystical poetry of Europe, the "garden enclosed" symbolized the Virgin Mary or a vision of Paradise.

## Das letzte Fuder

The Last Cartload

## Loge "lux in tenebris"

"Lux in Tenebris" lodge

A reference to Freemasonry

## Palette mit Flügeln

Palette with wings

## Thor

In Norse mythology, the warrior god of thunder and fertility, inseparable from his hammer Mjölnir

## EXHIBITION

### CURATOR

Jean-Michel Bouhours

### RESEARCH

Léa Salvador

### PRODUCTION

Sara Renaud

### EXHIBITION DESIGN

Corinne Marchand

### REGISTRAR

Flavie Jauffret

### ATELIER ANSELM KIEFER

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## PUBLICATIONS

### CATALOGUE

#### *Anselm Kiefer*

ed. Jean-Michel Bouhours  
Éditions du Centre Pompidou  
288 p., 350 ills  
Price 42 €

### ALBUM

#### *Anselm Kiefer*

Jean-Michel Bouhours,  
Marion Diez  
60 p., 65 ills  
Price 9,50 €

## APP

In French, English and Spanish  
Take a guided tour of the Anselm Kiefer exhibition with the Centre Pompidou's free app.  
Download from Google Play, Apple or Windows stores or by flashing the code below:



 Centre Pompidou

## AROUND THE EXHIBITION

### GUIDED TOURS

3 pm on Saturdays and Sundays  
7 pm on Wednesdays 3, 10, 17  
& 24 February, 2, 9, 16, 23 & 30  
March, 6 & 13 April  
(duration 90 mins)  
€4.50, concessions €3.50 +  
"Museums and Exhibitions" ticket  
at reduced rate

### TOURS FOR VISITORS WITH DISABILITIES

Saturdays 16 January, 6 February,  
12 March, 2 April  
10 am, for the visually impaired  
11 am, for the hearing impaired  
2.30 pm, for the deaf

### TALK: "PAROLE AUX ARTISTES"

Thursday 10 March, 7 pm  
Grande Salle, free  
Subject to availability  
With Anselm Kiefer

### FILM PROGRAMME

Friday 15 January, 8 pm, in the  
presence of the artist.  
Saturday 16 January, 3 pm, 5 pm,  
8 pm  
Sunday 17 January, 4 pm, 6 pm  
Monday 18 January, 7 pm  
Wednesday 20 January, 7 pm  
Cinéma 2, €6, concessions €4,  
free with annual pass subject  
to availability

## INFORMATION

**01 44 78 12 33**

**[www.centrepompidou.fr](http://www.centrepompidou.fr)**

### EXHIBITION OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

16 December 2015 – 18 April 2016  
Galerie 1, level 6  
Every day except Tuesdays,  
11 am to 9 pm  
Ticket desks close at 8 pm  
Late night opening Thursdays  
until 11 pm  
Ticket desks close at 10 pm

### PRICES

#### Access with "Museum & Exhibitions" ticket

Valid the same day for one  
admission to each area:  
the Museum, all exhibitions  
and the View of Paris  
€14, concessions €11  
Free for under-18s and holders  
of the annual pass

### Tickets on line

[www.centrepompidou.fr/billetterie](http://www.centrepompidou.fr/billetterie)

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**Graphic design**  
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### Printing

Graph 2000, Argentan, 2015