

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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PRESS RELEASE

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

VIA FRANCESCO CRISPI 16

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Tuesday – Saturday: 10:30am–7:00pm and by appointment



ANSELM KIEFER: *hortus philosophorum*

Friday, 3 April – Saturday, 23 May 2009

Opening reception for the artist: April 3rd, from 6:30 to 8:30 pm

"Rubble represents not only an end, but also a beginning. In reality, the so-called "Stunde Null" (zero hour) never existed. Rubble is like the blossom of a plant; it is the radiant highpoint of an incessant metabolism, the beginning of a rebirth. And the longer we can put off refilling empty spaces, the more fully and intensively we can produce a past that proceeds with the future as if reflected in a mirror. The 'Stunde Null' does not exist. Emptiness bares its opposite within itself."

--Anselm Kiefer

For the oval gallery, Kiefer has created a group of eight sculptures that evoke some of the central themes in his work deriving from his assiduous study of poetry, mythology, and cultural history. Each of the sculptures incorporates irregular stacks of massive books made from lead. Among them is *Paete, non dolet* (It does not hurt) inspired by the ancient Roman myth of Arria et Paetus; *Bilderstreit*, a recurring theme relating to the famous historical controversy over the use of religious imagery in the Byzantine Empire during the eighth and ninth centuries, which Kiefer recasts to represent his premise that "spiritual things such as art are always menaced by real physical power"; and *Sternenfall* (Falling Stars) a scattering of glass shards inscribed with numbers corresponding to stars in the charted galaxy. Another pervasive theme here, and in Kiefer's oeuvre in general, are great ships and sea vessels. *Verunglückte Hoffnung* is directly inspired by Caspar David Friedrich's dark masterpiece, *The Wreck of the Hope*, a tectonic depiction of a shipwreck in the Arctic Ocean that reached beyond documentary to suggest an allegory of human aspiration crushed by nature's immense and glacial indifference.

In addition to the sculptures are eight unusually large vertical collages based on photographs of Kiefer's *The Seven Heavenly Palaces* (2005), a series of monumental towers cast from concrete and lead intended to symbolize the mystical experience of the ascent through the seven levels of spirituality. The untitled collages treat the theme of Ararat, the mountain on which Noah's Ark came to rest when the flood waters receded.

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Kiefer's monumental archive of human memory gives overt material presence to a broad range of cultural myths and metaphors, from the Old and New Testaments to the Kabbalah, from ancient Roman history to the poetry of Ingeborg Bachmann and Paul C elan. By constructing elaborate scenographies that cross the boundaries of art and literature, painting and sculpture, Kiefer engages the complex events of history, the ancestral epics of life, death, and the cosmos, and the fragile endurance of the sacred and the spiritual amid the ongoing destruction of the world.

Anselm Kiefer was born in Germany during the last year of World War II. After studying law, he began his art education in Karlsruhe and then D usseldorf, where he met Joseph Beuys. His work has been shown in and collected by major museums throughout the world. Recent retrospective surveys include the Modern Art Museum, Fort Worth (2005) (traveling to the Mus e d'art contemporain de Montr al, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C., and SF MOMA), and the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao (2007). In 2007 Kiefer inaugurated the "Monumenta" program at the Grand Palais, Paris with an extensive site-specific installation of sculptures and paintings. Recently, he became the first living artist to create a permanent installation at the Louvre since Georges Braque in 1953. Kiefer lives and works in France.

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