

GAGOSIAN GALLERY



Art Talk Edward Goldman



My Thoughts on Madonna, Moses, and...Anselm Kiefer

TUE APR 8, 2008

Let me start today with an announcement that in order to accommodate election coverage through the primary season, this program has been moved temporarily to a new time slot on Tuesdays at 4:44pm. And now, back to business.

For me, last weekend turned out to be anything but usual. It's Saturday: I am drinking my morning coffee and, all of a sudden, I am in the presence of...Madonna, staring at me from the [cover of Vanity Fair](#). Still in great shape, still eager to provoke. Behind her, the globe that she holds -- or should I say, clutches -- with rather frightening determination. Then, another sip of coffee, and a quick look at another cover story: Moses and his famously thunderous voice is no more; [Charlton Heston](#) is dead.



Later that afternoon I went to Gagosian Gallery in Beverly Hills to see an [exhibition](#) of new works by [Anselm Kiefer](#), the remarkable German artist famous for addressing painful chapters of 20th century history. These days he lives in France, where [his recent show](#), at the Grand Palais, Paris, was a great success both with the public and critics. Luckily for us, a version of this show, with its heavy references to pagan and Christian iconography, came to LA. Those familiar with Kiefer's art will not be surprised by the monumental size of the paintings and sculptures shown in Beverly Hills, but nothing will prepare you for the overwhelming encounter with the truly gigantic scale of the [installation](#) that the artist created in the cavernous, crumbling gym space of the [First Baptist Church](#) in Koreatown.

There, upon entering the space, you are confronted by the dead fronds of an uprooted Palm tree, its trunk spanning close to sixty feet. This dead tree is an appropriate introduction to the sprawling installation of 36 large paintings, placed floor-to-ceiling in three rows of twelve. Soaring two stories high, they form a kind of altarpiece, each frame containing dried stems, leaves, or branches placed against a background of cracked clay. I swear, I could hear the rumbling voices of prophets filling the room. If I were not an avowed atheist, and if I were shopping for a religion, that would have been the time and place for an instantaneous conversion. And I'm not talking about Christianity, but a sort of Pantheism.



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Filled with sunlight, Gagosian Gallery is a dramatically different space compared to the church gym, but nevertheless, thanks to the presence of Kiefer's work, the atmosphere in the room is somber, even mournful. Ten-foot tall 'books' made out of metal stand on end, their pages splayed, dried sunflowers sticking out as bookmarks. A few more gigantic, mixed media paintings cover the walls. At this point it was difficult for me to tell what voices I was hearing emanating from Kiefer's work -- those of the prophets of the Old Testament or the gods and heroes of a Wagnerian opera.

With so many artists today habitually and unjustifiably working on a large scale -- [Jeff Koons](#) and [Damien Hirst](#) spring immediately to mind -- Anselm Kiefer is the only artist I can think of who never abuses this device, never betrays our trust when we follow him on his epic journey telling a story that is bigger than him and bigger than us: a story about life and death and resurrection...



Anselm Kiefer, an exhibition in two parts
On view at [Gagosian Gallery](#), Beverly Hills
March 29 – April 27

Anselm Kiefer: *Palmsonntag* (Palm Sunday)
On view at the [First Baptist Church](#) Gym
March 30 – April 27, Wed-Sun, noon-6pm only
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