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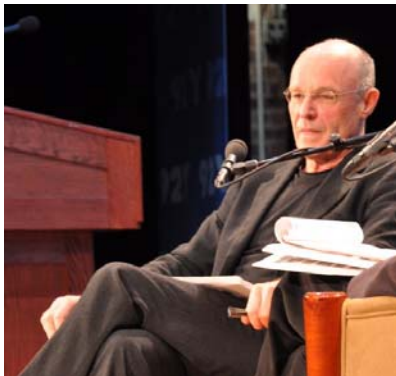
ANSELM KIEFER'S REMEMBRANCES OF THINGS PAST November 12th, 2010

By Kiša Lala



ANSELM KIEFER Fitzcarraldo, 2010 Oil, emulsion, acrylic, shellac, ash, thorn bushes, resin ferns, synthetic teeth, lead and rust on canvas in glass and steel frames 130 11/16 x 302 3/8 x 13 13/16 inches (332 x 768 x 35 cm) © Anselm Kiefer. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery

To experience **Anselm Kiefer's** new exhibition at Gagosian Gallery is to enter a monochromatic forest with walls of flaking, mud-encrusted canvases that transport us into a world at times foreboding, at others, shamanic and mystical.



Anselm Kiefer speaking at 92Y photo:
K.Lala, 2010

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ANSELM KIEFER *Merkaba*, 2010 Airplane fuselage, photographs, lead, and oil, emulsion, acrylic, shellac, clay on canvas in inscribed glass and steel vitrine, 126 x 220 1/2 x 90 5/8 inches. (320 x 560 x 230 cm) KIEFER 2010.0018

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Merkaba, 2010 - © Anselm Kiefer. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery



Anselm Kiefer speaking at 92Y photo: K.Lala, 2010

Through this organic web of ‘memories,’ both historical and personal, Kiefer evokes a sense of past. Faded photographs on lead plates hint at a militaristic epoch in which Kiefer appears making the Hitlergruß, the Nazi salute in front of historically significant landmarks that deliberately confront a troubled time.

During his conversation at 92Y with curator and critic **Sir Norman Rosenthal** (who co-curated [Sensation](#) during his tenure at London’s Royal Academy), Kiefer said that his painted photographs incorporate several levels of histories. “The photograph is a moment. It’s interesting to combine the two because there is a tension between a moment and history.”

The artist seemed unruffled by much of the interviewer’s rhetorical line of questioning. When Rosenthal remarked that his paintings evoked graveyards, Kiefer replied that they were in fact more about the living, that the past was a

story written by the living: “Ruins, for me, are the beginning. With the debris, you can construct new ideas. They are symbols of a beginning.”

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Sir Norman Rosenthal and Terence Koh keeping each other company at Gagosian Gallery. Photo K.Lala 2010

In some of the paintings in relief hang empty dresses that retain memories of the shapes of their owners, implying the absence of the physical body (arguably recalling the discarded clothes of Holocaust victims). Kiefer is drawn to the grandness of decay, the remnants of lost cultures, things left in the wake of civilization that implicate us.



Kiefer has studied the Zohar, and weaves in elements from the text on Jewish mysticism. In several glass vitrines, some 20 feet tall, the artist references Kabbalah, and the Sefiroth, symbolizing the energetic systems of the body. These monolithic shrines of glass and steel contain assemblages of decaying matter; lead, ash, organic remains, burnt texts, snakeskin, dresses and an aircraft's fuselage – that together construct an arcane narrative.

Rosenthal, citing Kant, asked at one point, “Do you think art is a moral imperative?” Kiefer responded by saying that morals change, so art can at one moment be moral, at another, amoral. What is imperative is relative to survival.

For Kiefer, the creative process is the most important act, and many of his paintings remain unfinished. “Do you know when a painting is finished?” asked Rosenthal. “Sometimes I know... sometimes I need the money,” Kiefer quipped.

Indeed, such quick deflections might come naturally, as the artist claims to have had studied sophism in his early years. But Kiefer admitted that back then, “I knew, that I knew nothing.” “If the intellect isn't combined with emotion,” he went on, “then it becomes abstract.”

Julian Schnabel, who attended Kiefer's talk, later discussed Kiefer with Rosenthal, and said, that in his own view, he did not separate intellect and feelings. Asked what he thought of Kiefer's show, Schnabel replied glibly, “I thought it was pretty good.” He felt that he and Kiefer both have the soul of a six year old. For Kiefer the connection to his art is spiritual. “I grew up in a forest. It's like a room. It's protected. Like a cathedral... it is a place between heaven and earth.”

“Life is an illusion,” concluded Kiefer. “I am held together in the nothingness by art.”

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Next Year in Jerusalem, Installation view Photo by Rob McKeever - © Anselm Kiefer. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery

Anselm Kiefer – *Next Year in Jerusalem* – November 6 – December 18, 2010, Gagosian Gallery 555 West 24th Street New York, NY 10011

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