

## GAGOSIAN GALLERY

# Miami Herald

### Margulies exhibit salutes a powerful German artist

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*Anselm Kiefer 'Geheimnis der Farne,' 2007 Jon Lowe*

At the Margulies Collection at the Warehouse, there's an unexpected atmospheric complement to the already powerful Anselm Kiefer exhibit, likely one of the best art experiences Miamians will have in 2016. It comes from a sound installation of Susan Philipsz, who has mixed a selection of compositions from 1930s German émigré Hanns Eisler, and the haunting music permeates the Margulies galleries.

It's a perfect duet, accompanying the new installations, painting and sculpture of Kiefer, a German artist whose monumental work is deeply grounded in the dramatic and traumatic history of his native country.

The scope of this stellar artist is expertly laid out at Margulies: Four huge rooms were specifically made to accommodate literally tons of sculpture and 10,000 pounds of painting. Yet there are relatively few actual pieces.

The two newly acquired installations were designed for the revamped space, and Kiefer came to Miami for the first time to help install them.

These two rooms, holding *Ages of the World* and *The Secret of the Ferns*, are separated by an empty, white room, per instructions of the artist. It is a dramatic entrance into these somber, complex, stunning chambers that Kiefer has created here. Even the titles are heavy with history and poetry.

*Ages*, or *Die Erdzeitalter*, contains an immense layered pyre as its centerpiece, surrounded by two large charcoal paintings. The sculpture is stacked with what could look like horizontal painting frames and book covers, with rubble, dirt and debris stuffed in between and falling from the pile. Growing out from all sides are metallic mushroom shoots.

So much of Kiefer's aesthetic and influences are revealed in this piece, first made for a show at the Royal Academy in London in 2014.

Kiefer was born as Germany lay in rubble, in 1945. He has grappled with the horrific destruction of the war that brought that rubble on, and the Holocaust that it produced, in his art. But the enlightened side of German culture, so entranced with literature, poetry, music, with Romantic notions of nature in painting, seep out of this sculpture as well. Yes, this pyre is positioned to burn, or simply disintegrate, but it is stacked with the riches of history, maybe to be rediscovered.

The room to the right holds *Ferns*, or *Geheimnis der Farne*. Two concrete tombs — again massive in size — are crumbling in the middle of the room, surrounded by 48 paintings made from his tell-tale materials of ash, charcoal, dirt and in this case dried ferns. It can be overwhelming, and in both these rooms you can smell the feral matter.

Life is decaying in this space, but also renewing.

Kiefer, especially here in sunny South Florida, can be solely defined by these dark places he explores. But that's too simple. In *Ferns* another important Germanic strain can be ascertained; a respect and love of the earth. From Goethe, whose first publication was about plants, to Gustav Mahler's *Song of the Earth*, nature has been a major muse in German culture. Modern Germany is one of the greenest countries in the world.

So looking closely at the paintings of dried ferns, one can see the sprouts of new life, like when weeds start to break through that crumbling concrete wall or street. The earth can still spring eternal.

According to the description of the installation from Kiefer himself, ferns can also be a guide to a history of the ages. "The first trees were ferns. They are primal. Charcoal and oil are made out of ferns that existed at the beginning of life. There are many stories about plants having memories. If this is true, ferns could tell us a great deal about our beginnings. Like forests, ferns may contain secret knowledge."

To further lighten the mood, Kiefer left a present on his trip to Miami in October. To help out one of the charities founder Martin Margulies helps fund, the Lotus House shelter for homeless women and children, he donated a painting and created a new one in charcoal directly on the wall, called *Tree of Life*.

But on the whole, given the size, the materials, the coloring, the subject matter of the artworks, Kiefer's world is not a bright one. One of his influences throughout the years has been the poetry of Holocaust survivor Paul Celan. A painting in a separate room is dedicated to the poet, titled *Your House Rode the Dark Wave*. It is supposedly based on images of plowed fields in Austria, but, created with charcoal, tree branches and plaster, it looks like a burnt wasteland, or the remnants of a camp.

In an early 1980s' painting *Lilith's Daughter*, some children's dresses float above pock-marked apartment buildings in hues of gray, brown and white. In the Old Testament, Lilith is said to live in abandoned cities and ruins, questioning God's perfection.

Also on display is the first Kiefer that Martin Margulies bought, which started the collector's love affair with the German artist's work: *Sprache der Vögel*, translated as *Language of the Birds*. It's again related to a mythical idea, that birds held the secret of alchemy. But this gigantic bird, sitting alone in one white room, crafted from lead, steel and wood, doesn't look like it's about to tell us something revealing. Wings spread and menacing, it resembles the symbol often associated with German aggression, the black eagle.

These can be troubling artworks to see on one level, but to view them as overtly grim is missing an important aspect. Without acknowledging the past, we can't move forward in a healthy manner. And dying ferns, after all, can become incredibly fertile.

With the keen eyes of Margulies and longtime curator Katherine Hinds guiding this exhibit, these rooms have been transformed into a one-of-a-kind survey of Kiefer in the United States.

One with a soundtrack, even if unintentional. After immersing yourself in the Kiefer galleries, don't forget to check out where that music is emanating from. Turner Prize winner Philipsz has created a 24-channel sound installation based on the film compositions that Eisler wrote from the 1920s through the '40s, in both Germany and the United States.

After escaping Nazi Germany, Eisler landed in Los Angeles, but he was later blacklisted as a Communist. The walls surrounding the speakers that hang from the ceiling are a collection of collages of Eisler's original musical scores combined with the FBI's files on him, often blacked out or deleted. He left one evil to run into another. What a companion piece to the work of Kiefer, underscoring in many ways that it's not just the Germans who need to address the wrongs of history, while pointing out the beauty that can be recovered.