

## GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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### Anselm Kiefer

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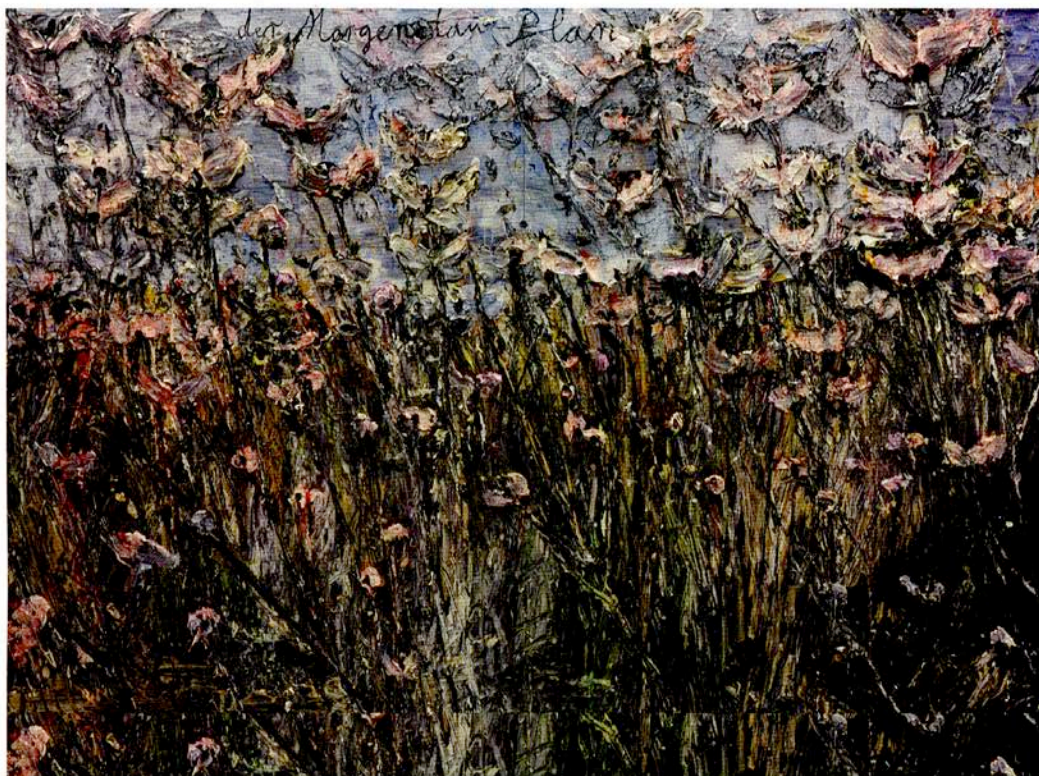
One person's utopia is another's dystopia. With a few tweaks, an ideal community becomes a concentration camp. Anselm Kiefer takes utopian thought to task in this spectacular show, "Morgenthau Plan," which debuted in France last fall. As well he might: Hitler's thousand-year

with words. Kiefer blots out the real fields captured by his camera and replaces them with art.

Protruding from one canvas are two simulated weapons, a Browning machine gun and a Soviet AK-47, while from another projects a much-reduced fighter-plane wing. Despite the superficially pastoral images (fields of flowers, fallow fields), there is always in Kiefer's

flower-filled paintings.

The largest painting here was inscribed with lyrics from the first stanza of Germany's ancient national anthem, the *Deutschlandlied* or "Song of Germany": "From the Meuse to the Memel, / From the Adige to the Belt, / Germany, Germany above everything, / Above everything in the world!" Frightening in the Nazi era, these words originally



Anselm Kiefer, *der Morgenthau-Plan*, 2012, acrylic, emulsion, oil, and shellac on photograph mounted on canvas, 110" x 149".

Reich and Stalin's workers' paradise, hanging like portraits over his head, would be the utopian nightmares that conditioned his thinking.

Kiefer's technique in the 15 paintings here reflected the problematic relationship between artist and art. He first photographed fields near his home in southern France, then had the photos sized to fit canvases, and finally painted over the images using a thick impasto technique. This process echoes the artist's critique of authors of utopian literature, who also replace reality, but

work the suggestion that violence is imminent.

The show's title derives from the 1944 plan of U.S. Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau Jr. to transform industrial Germany into an agricultural economy. Elements of the plan were enacted between 1945 and 1947, but it was abandoned when it became clear that a prosperous Germany would more likely assure a peaceful Germany than would a starving pastoral state. Morgenthau's vision of an agrarian Germany provided the irony hovering over Kiefer's spectacular,

sought to inspire Germans to unite and form a nation. The painting is a vista looking out onto water, perhaps one of the rivers in the anthem, but Kiefer also seems to allude to painters John Constable and Eugène Boudin—to Constable's stormy sky over water, and Boudin's marine landscapes. Both painters ushered in art for art's sake.

Kiefer's paintings, along with two sculptures composed of cattails frozen in a concrete bed, never looked better, combining lyric beauty and lurking violence.

—Alfred Mac Adam