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Contact:

Robyn Wise, 415.357.4172, rwise@sfmoma.org
Libby Garrison, 415.357.4177, lgarrison@sfmoma.org
Sandra Farish Sloan, 415.357.4174, ssloan@sfmoma.org

MAJOR SURVEY OF ANSELM KIEFER'S WORKS AT SFMOMA

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) will present *Anselm Kiefer: Heaven and Earth* from October 20, 2006, to January 21, 2007. The first North American survey of this influential contemporary German artist's oeuvre in 20 years, this traveling exhibition brings together more than 50 major works, many of which have never before been seen in the United States. Organized by Michael Auping, chief curator at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, *Anselm Kiefer: Heaven and Earth* completes its international tour in San Francisco in a presentation overseen by SFMOMA Curator of Painting and Sculpture Janet Bishop. National sponsorship of *Anselm Kiefer: Heaven and Earth* is made possible by the global financial services firm UBS.



Buch mit Flügeln (Book with Wings), 1992–94;
Collection of the Modern Art Museum of Fort
Worth, Museum purchase, Sid W. Richardson
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Not intended as a retrospective, the exhibition is a thematic survey that focuses on the artist's ongoing meditation on metaphysical issues and various notions of transcendence and the spiritual—in particular the relationship between heaven and earth—using symbolism and the mythology of ancient religion as a foundation for investigating the broader subjects of human character, collective memory, and mankind's universal desire to understand existence.

Arranged roughly chronologically, the exhibition will showcase a selection of Kiefer's diverse output from 1969 to 2005, including paintings, sculptures, works on paper, mixed-media photographic projects, and artist's books. Given the monumental scale and fragility of Kiefer's works, the contents of the presentation have varied at each tour venue. SFMOMA's presentation will include extraordinary works by Kiefer from the Museum's own collection, such as the monumental painting *Isis and Osiris* (1985–87), as well as other critically important pieces from a renowned private collection in San Francisco that did not travel to previous tour venues.

“Since the 1980s, contemporary German art has been a particular area of focus within the SFMOMA collection, though this is the first public presentation of Kiefer's work ever to be mounted in San Francisco,” states Bishop. “As such, this exhibition offers a rare opportunity to see the artist's work in both much greater depth and in the context of the issues that are most central to his practice.”

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Widely hailed for his remarkable sense of materiality, Kiefer uses a variety of media to create works ranging from delicate watercolors to enormous multipart paintings to monumental sculptural installations composed of lead and steel. Drawing on the physical characteristics of his media to underscore intellectual concerns, Kiefer embraces a complex array of subjects—medieval alchemy, occult philosophy, astronomy, pagan ritual, religious mysticism—in order to address the dialogue between history and spirituality.

Anselm Kiefer (b. 1945), alongside contemporaries Gerhard Richter and Sigmar Polke, was one of the first contemporary German artists to achieve international recognition in the early 1980s with his neo-expressionist paintings. Among his peers, however, Joseph Beuys—the most influential figure in the postwar European art world and Kiefer’s mentor at the Dusseldorf Academy—had the greatest and most direct impact on Kiefer’s work.

Using an intricate system of symbols and imagery drawn from myth, legend, and poetry, Kiefer has earned wide acclaim for his ruminations on German history—particularly on the moral weight carried by Germany after World War II—conveyed largely in mammoth-scale paintings layered with his signature materials: tar, straw, iron, lead, glass, pottery, burned wood, and other organic plant matter. Since his major mid-career retrospective in 1987, which traveled nationally, Kiefer’s work has rarely been seen in the United States, however.

From the very beginning of Kiefer’s career, he has explored deep-rooted, principal questions about the history of spirituality and its connection to scientific and political realms. *Anselm Kiefer: Heaven and Earth* begins with the artist’s earliest surviving work, *The Heavens* (1969), a small collage book containing pictures of clouds and sky cut from magazines and affixed to white pages labeled with text. The artist’s use of fragmentary, rather than whole, images evokes the notion that heaven cannot be distilled into a single image or place but is better symbolized by fleeting impressions, a theme consistent in much of his art.

This work is followed by a series of early paintings in which Kiefer introduces many symbols and reoccurring motifs—trees, fire, winter, nightfall, the artist’s palette, barren countryside, charred landscape—that would go on to define his visual vocabulary. In one of these early paintings, an oil on canvas titled *Man in the Forest* (1971), Kiefer depicts himself standing in a small clearing of forest, wearing his nightclothes and surrounded by towering trees. Holding a burning branch, the figure appears at once threatening and fearful. In this dreamscape, the forest is not only an obvious symbol for German nationalism, Romanticism, and legends of the Black Forest, it also refers to pagan traditions of earth worship and ancient myths of heroic struggle between mankind and nature, as well as to the kabalistic Tree of Life and the Old Testament’s Garden of Eden. Tree trunks that extend beyond the picture plane suggest their reach far into the sky, perhaps alluding to a bridge between terrestrial and celestial realms.

The exhibition continues with several works from Kiefer’s *Attic* series of the early 1970s, in which the exposed wood floor and ceiling of his art studio at the time—the attic of a former German schoolhouse—function as a forestlike architectural stage for his re-imaginings of metaphysical and historical lore. *Quaternity* (1973), a 15-foot-wide drawing rendered in oil and charcoal on burlap, refers to a theological debate within the early Christian church about the role of evil. In this canvas, three flames, labeled “Father,” “Son,” and “Holy Ghost,” are joined by connecting lines to a serpent labeled “Satan,” forming a closed diagram that seems to erupt from an all-over background of meticulously rendered wood grain. Mapping the interdependency between God and the devil, the work highlights a favorite theme of Kiefer’s: paradox—the fires of the Holy Trinity that illuminate and redeem can

also burn and destroy. Like *Man in Forest*, this work typifies the artist's use of his own image—here represented by the serpent—as well as his incorporation of handwriting.

Among the different media Kiefer has worked with over the years, artist's books have been a consistent and central part of his practice. "The book—the idea of a book or the image of a book—is a symbol of learning, of transmitting knowledge," he has said. "I make my own books to find my own way through the old stories." To create one of his early book projects, a seven-volume series called *Cauterization of the Rural District of Buchen* (1975), Kiefer burned a selection of his paintings, cut the scorched canvas into pages, and interspersed them with photographs representing staged explosions in landscapes around Buchen, the district where he was then living. The term *cauterization*—the medical procedure by which tissue is burned to facilitate healing—alludes to the restorative properties of fire, invoking the metaphorical rehabilitation of a wounded landscape and, by extension, the renewal of German national mythology. The burnt, carbonized pages of the book suggest both the material of destruction and the basic constituent of all life forms on earth, again illustrating Kiefer's longstanding interest in alchemy, dualism, and paradoxical states.

Many of Kiefer's books take the form of freestanding sculptures, monumental symbols of his quest for spiritual knowledge through art and image. *Book with Wings* (1992–94), a massive tome made of lead, lies open on a high lectern and has majestic wings sprouting from each side as if poised for flight. *Secret Life of Plants* (2001), a more than 6-foot-high book made of lead, stands upright on its spine, its pages fanned open. The work's title refers to a book published in 1973 that investigates the proposed consciousness of plants and the idea that they may hold answers to the mysteries of life—a concept pioneered by the 16th-century mystic philosopher Robert Fludd, who proposed that each plant on earth has a corresponding star in the universe. Containing an intricate numerical mapping of the stars based on NASA information, Kiefer's book continues an age-old rumination on the unfathomable correspondence between the microcosmic and the macrocosmic.

Kiefer's current Barjac studio complex in the south of France comprises a network of above- and underground installations created for the artist's ongoing investigation of the ancient kabbalistic system of thought known as *merkaba*. A reoccurring motif in his work, the term alludes to a chariot that journeys through the *Hechaloth*, the seven heavenly palaces that eventually lead to the throne of God. The Barjac installation involves a series of concrete rooms stacked hundreds of feet into the air as well as subterranean spaces containing various books and sculptures. Recent works such as the large-scale mixed-media canvas *Sefer Hechaloth* (2002) and *Die Himmelspaläste* (2004) feature seven shelves or metal cages that act as containers for symbolic objects. A number of gouaches from 2003 also are based on photographs of both found and formed objects that are part of the artist's immense studio installation project

The exhibition also includes a number of works created since 1990, many of which have not been seen in the United States. This last decade and a half of Kiefer's output reveals a new chapter in the artist's development: Fields of tilting sunflowers, immense desert landscapes, colossal pyramids, and panoramas of stars are now a part of Kiefer's cosmological vocabulary.

Anselm Kiefer: Heaven and Earth is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue of the same title (\$40 softcover, \$60 hardcover; 186 pages) published by the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth in collaboration with Prestel, featuring texts and an interview with the artist by Michael Auping.

In conjunction with the exhibition, SFMOMA's Education Department will present related events and interpretive programs, including film screenings, daily docent tours, an online feature, a podcast, and an opening-week public talk by Auping. In addition, visitors will be able to learn more about Kiefer in a special resource room—the Learning Lounge—located in the galleries.

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Anselm Kiefer: Heaven and Earth is organized by the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth. The San Francisco presentation is generously supported by Collectors Forum, an SFMOMA auxiliary, and the Estate of Ann Hall.

National sponsorship of *Anselm Kiefer: Heaven and Earth* is made possible by the global financial services firm UBS. UBS, one of the world's leading financial firms, is the largest wealth manager, a top-tier investment banking and securities firm, a key asset manager, and the leader in Swiss retail and commercial banking. Headquartered in Zurich and Basel, UBS employs more than 68,000 people and has offices in 50 countries. It is a Swiss public company listed on the SWX Swiss Stock Exchange, the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE), and the Tokyo Stock Exchange (TSE). In the United States, UBS is one of the biggest private client businesses with a client base of nearly 2 million private clients and approximately 7,500 financial advisers in more than 350 offices.

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Museum hours: Open daily (except Wednesdays): 11 a.m. to 5:45 p.m.; open late Thursdays, until 8:45 p.m. Summer hours (Memorial Day to Labor Day): Open at 10 a.m. Closed Wednesdays and the following public holidays: New Year's Day, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Christmas. The Museum is open the Wednesday between Christmas and New Year's Day.

Koret Visitor Education Center: Open daily (except Wednesdays): 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; open late Thursdays, until 8:30 p.m. Summer hours: Open at 10 a.m.

Admission prices: Adults \$12.50; seniors \$8; students \$7. SFMOMA members and children 12 and under are admitted free. Thursday evenings after 6 p.m. admission is half-price. The first Tuesday of each month admission is free.

SFMOMA is easily accessible by Muni, BART, Golden Gate Transit, SamTrans, and Caltrain. Hourly, daily, and monthly parking is available at the SFMOMA Garage at 147 Minna Street. For parking information, call 415.348.0971.

Visit our Web site at www.sfmoma.org or call 415.357.4000 for more information.

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