

Press Release

Anselm Kiefer *Hommage à un poète*

9 January—11 May 2022

Thaddaeus Ropac
Paris Pantin
69 Avenue du Général Leclerc, 93500 Pantin



1. Anselm Kiefer, *Paul Celan: du rollst die Altäre zeiteinwärts*, 2021

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Poetry is the only possible reality. Everything else is an illusion.

— Anselm Kiefer, 2021

Hommage à un poète (Homage to a poet) is an exhibition of new works by the German artist Anselm Kiefer, taking place at Thaddaeus Ropac Paris Pantin from 9 January until 11 May 2022. In the eighteen large-scale paintings on view, he pays tribute to poets Ingeborg Bachmann, Paul Celan, Osip Mandelstam and August Graf von Platen, bringing together image and language in elegiac landscapes inhabited by memory. The exhibition follows Anselm Kiefer's show at the Grand Palais Éphémère dedicated to Paul Celan, whose work has had a profound influence on the painter's practice throughout his career.

Poems are 'like buoys in the sea' for Anselm Kiefer, who thought of becoming a writer before he turned to painting. 'You swim from one to the other,' he writes in his journal in 2017, 'without them you're without direction, lost. They are the handholds where something masses together in the infinite expanse.' Before the poem, however, comes the painting. Bunkers from the Atlantic Wall, buildings in ruins, wheat fields and snow-laden forests emerge from thick impasto in the paintings on view in the exhibition. As Anselm Kiefer works, he holds fragments of poems in his mind, combining, as art historian Andréa Lauterwein writes, their 'auditory remanence with the retinal remanence of the image'.

Throughout his extensive oeuvre, Anselm Kiefer is concerned with history and memory, their preservation and erosion. Born as the Second World War was drawing to a close, the artist grew up in a time during which many in Germany were struggling to face the horrors of the conflict and acknowledge the atrocities perpetrated in the Holocaust. His works emerge from these years of silence, like monuments to the trauma of a generation. The poems of Ingeborg Bachmann (1926–1973) and Paul Celan (1920–1970) gave voice to the emptiness and the grief left by the war. Their words reverberate throughout the works in the exhibition.



2. Anselm Kiefer, *Für Paul Celan - Angewintertes*, 2014-2020

Anselm Kiefer's process is alchemical, allowing words, images and materials to merge and mutate on the canvas. In works like *Oh Halme der Nacht* (2020) and *Für Paul Celan - Angewintertes* (2014–2020), he incorporates substances that directly refer to the subject matter of the paintings: straw in the wheat fields and pieces of porcelain in the snow scenes. Several of the artist's new works feature a technique in which he applies shellac — a naturally occurring varnish — melting and burning it onto the painting to create an opalescent effect. Next to smoke-like forms or apparitions, the material adds an unprecedented, almost spiritual dimension to Anselm Kiefer's already metaphysical paintings.



3. Anselm Kiefer, *Wolfsbohne von Paul Celan : ihr Blüten von Deutschland*, 2020

Im Herz des Bergs (2021) is one such work featuring the words of Russian poet Osip Mandelstam (1891–1938), translated into German by Paul Celan: 'Im Herz des Bergs, mit nichts, geht sie ihm hin, die Zeit' (In the heart of the mountain, time comes to him with nothing). The victims of immeasurable violence under repressive, totalitarian regimes, Paul Celan recognised some of his own experience of the Nazi labour camps in Osip Mandelstam's descriptions of Soviet gulags. Both writers dismantled their native tongues to reflect the debilitating nature of the tragedies they endured, resisting, as Anselm Kiefer describes it, by making 'language become mute.' The painter evokes their process as well as their words in his paintings, asking us, as novelist Orhan Pamuk wrote in 2015, to 'look beyond what words represent and signify, and notice instead their texture and the connections they form with each other.'

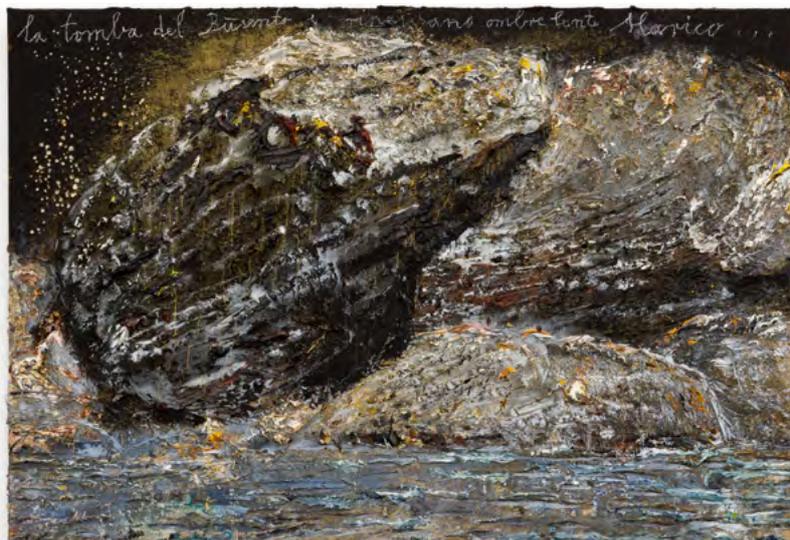
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4. Anselm Kiefer, *nur wer das Wort noch weiß für die Karfunkelfee*, 1976-2021

Words echo the artist's material processes of amalgamation and sedimentation in the paintings on view in the exhibition. A group of four works references the German poet August Graf von Platen's 1820 ballad 'Das Grab im Busento' (The Grave in the Busento), which tells the story of Alaric, king of the Visigoths, who died in Italy after leading the sack of Rome and was buried in the Busento river. Part myth, part history, the ancient king's fate is mirrored in August Graf von Platen's own death from cholera in Sicily in 1835. Further entwining the German and Italian mythologies, one of the paintings features the Italian translation by poet Giosuè Carducci. Affixed by Anselm Kiefer to a painting of a weathered cliff-face, the words take us through layers of time, highlighting the mutability of language and the cyclical nature of history.

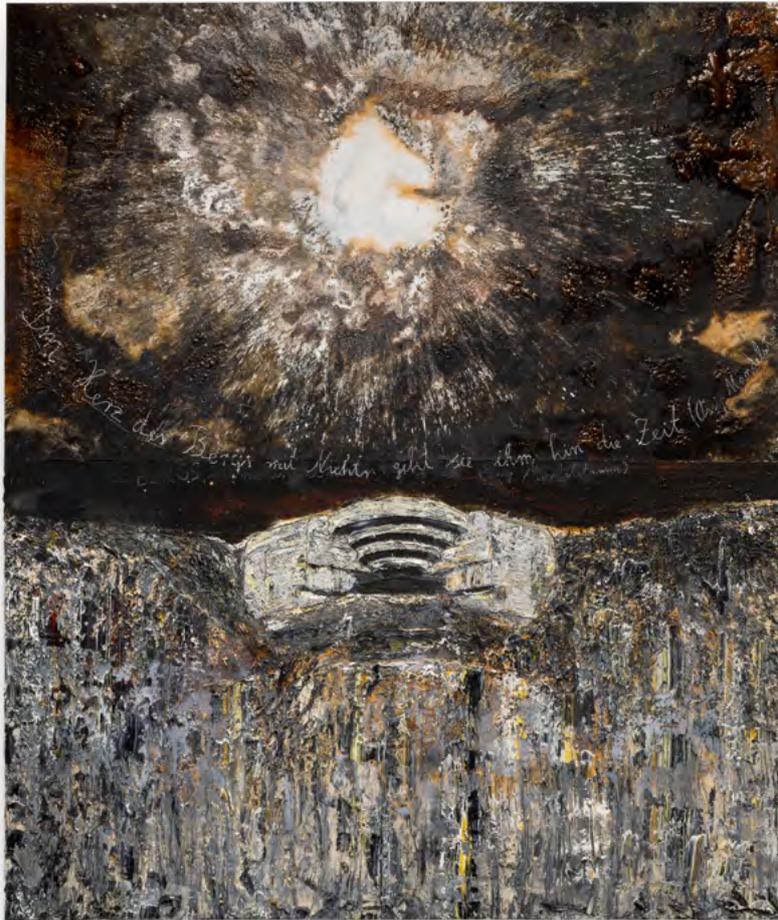


5. Anselm Kiefer, *La tomba del Busento e ripassano ombre lente Alarico...*, 2021

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Anselm Kiefer often returns to his paintings over the course of several years, adding and subtracting, destroying them in part with fire and acid, or leaving them outside to be weathered by the elements. 'I think a painting is never finished,' he states in a recent interview, 'it's always in movement.' This cycle of creation and destruction is at the heart of the practice of the artist, who sometimes adds highly symbolic three-dimensional objects to his paintings, such as the scythe in *Oh Halme der Nacht* (2020). In the exhibition, Anselm Kiefer pays homage to the medium of poetry, which he sees as a concentrate of memory and experience, capable of expressing itself outside of historical and material realities. His densely layered paintings bring together the poems, myths and fragments of history that inhabit his imaginary, constructing a space in which to confront the fundamental questions that continue to face humanity.



6. Anselm Kiefer, *Im Herz des Bergs*, 2021



About the artist

Anselm Kiefer was born in 1945 in Donaueschingen, Germany. In 1992, he moved to France, where he lives and works between Paris and Barjac near Avignon. He studied law, literature and linguistics before attending the Academy of Fine Arts in Karlsruhe. As a young artist, Anselm Kiefer encountered Joseph Beuys and participated in his performance *Save the Woods* (1971). In 1980, Anselm Kiefer was selected for the West German Pavilion at the 39th Venice Biennale in 1980 and his works have since been shown in prominent solo exhibitions internationally, including at the Städtische Kunsthalle Düsseldorf (1984); Art Institute of Chicago (1987); Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin (1991); Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (1998); Fondation Beyeler, Basel (2001); Guggenheim Bilbao (2007); Royal Academy of Arts, London (2014); Centre Pompidou, Paris (2015); Bibliothèque Nationale de France (2015); Albertina, Vienna (2016); State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (2017); Rodin Museum, Paris (2017); Met Breuer, New York (2018) and Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo (2019).

Anselm Kiefer was presented the Praemium Imperiale Award by Japan in 1999, and in 2008 he received the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade. In 2007 he showed at Monumenta in the Grand Palais in Paris and was the first artist since Georges Braque to have a permanent installation commissioned for the Louvre. In 2018 his site-specific sculpture *Uraeus* was exhibited in front of the Rockefeller Center, New York. French President Emmanuel Macron commissioned Anselm Kiefer to create a permanent installation for the Panthéon in Paris in 2020. An exhibition of monumental works by Anselm Kiefer dedicated to Paul Celan is on view at the Grand Palais Éphémère in Paris until 11 January 2022.

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1. Anselm Kiefer, Paul Celan: du rollst die Altäre zeiteinwärts, 2021. Emulsion, acrylic, oil, shellac, chalk on canvas. 280 x 380 cm. (110,24 x 149,61 in) © Anselm Kiefer. Photo: Georges Poncet. **2. Anselm Kiefer, Für Paul Celan - Angewintertes, 2014-2020.** Emulsion, oil, acrylic, shellac, porcelain, metal wire and coal on canvas. 280 x 380 cm (110,24 x 149,61 in) © Anselm Kiefer. Photo: Georges Poncet. **3. Anselm Kiefer, Wolfsbohne von Paul Celan : ihr Blüten von Deutschland, 2020.** Emulsion, acrylic, oil, shellac, and chalk on canvas. 280 x 380 cm (110,24 x 149,61 in). © Anselm Kiefer. Photo: Georges Poncet. **4. Anselm Kiefer, nur wer das Wort noch weiß für die Karfunkelfee, 1976-2021.** Emulsion, oil, acrylic, shellac, gold leaf, fabric, soil, metal and chalk on canvas. 210 x 280 cm (82,68 x 110,24 in) © Anselm Kiefer. Photo: Georges Poncet. **5. Anselm Kiefer, La tomba del Busento e ripassano ombre lente Alarico..., 2021.** Emulsion, oil, acrylic, shellac, gold leaf and chalk on canvas. 190 x 280 cm (74,8 x 110,24 in). © Anselm Kiefer. Photo: Georges Poncet. **6. Anselm Kiefer, Im Herz des Bergs, 2021.** Emulsion, acrylic, oil, shellac, and chalk on canvas. 560 x 470 cm (220,47 x 185,04 in). © Anselm Kiefer. Photo: Charles Duprat. **7. Portrait of the artist, Photo: Georges Poncet.**

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