

ANSELM KIEFER
FOR
PAUL CELAN

17 DEC. 2021 –
11 JAN. 2022

GRAND

PALAIS

éphémère

Fifteen years after launching the *Monumenta* series at the Grand Palais, Anselm Kiefer is the first artist to occupy the entire space of the Grand Palais Éphémère. His work continues to relentlessly question memory and forgetting, history and story.

This exhibition is a tribute to the poet Paul Celan, who has inspired the artist ever since he first read the poem *Todesfuge* (*Death Fugue*) as a teenager. *For Paul Celan* brings together several decades-old creations with others completed in 2020 and 2021.

“Paul Celan's language comes from so far away, from another world with which we have not yet been confronted, it reaches us like that of an extraterrestrial. It is difficult for us to understand. We catch fragments of it here and there. We cling to it without ever being able to grasp it as a whole. I have tried, humbly, for sixty years. Now I am writing this language on canvas, an endeavour that requires the same devotion as a rite.”

Anselm Kiefer

“The more time we spend with his work, and the more adept we become at finding our bearings within it, the greater is our sense of it as a kind of labyrinth (...), [where] Kiefer is playing a triple role—Dedalus, Theus and the Minotaur.”

As such, the artist invites us to abandon chronology and a precisely ordered sequence, and instead walk freely around the Nave to encounter his works.

Anselm Kiefer,

who is originally from Germany, has lived and worked in France since 1992 – he describes himself as both French and German. He was the inaugural artist for “Monumenta” in Paris, a series of exhibitions specially developed for the immense Nave of the Grand Palais.

Now, he will become the first artist to occupy the Grand Palais Éphémère.

Paul Celan

Considered the greatest postwar German language poet, Paul Ancel, known as Paul Celan, was born in 1920 in what is now Romania. The only son of a Jewish family, he experienced the terrible ordeals of forced labour camps and the deportation of his parents.

A translator, publisher and author, he composed his pen name from an anagram of his surname. Celan settled in Paris in 1955, became a French national, married the artist Gisèle de Lestrangue with whom he had a son, and taught at the École Normale Supérieure between 1959 and 1970. Alongside this, he continued translating (Rimbaud, Valéry, Char, etc.) and published many volumes of poetry, several of which have won literary awards.

He committed suicide by drowning himself in the Seine in 1970.

The poems, or fragments of poems, by Paul Celan used by Anselm Kiefer in his paintings are translated and displayed on floor labels around the exhibition, where official translations are available.

Paul Celan tells us:

“No one bears witness for the witness.”²

“You are at home, in your language, your references, among the books, the works you love.
But I am on the outside...”³

“I have never written a line that did not have something to do with my existence.”⁴

Stalks of the Night

From hearts and brains
sprout the stalks of night,
and a word, spoken by scythes,
bends them into life.

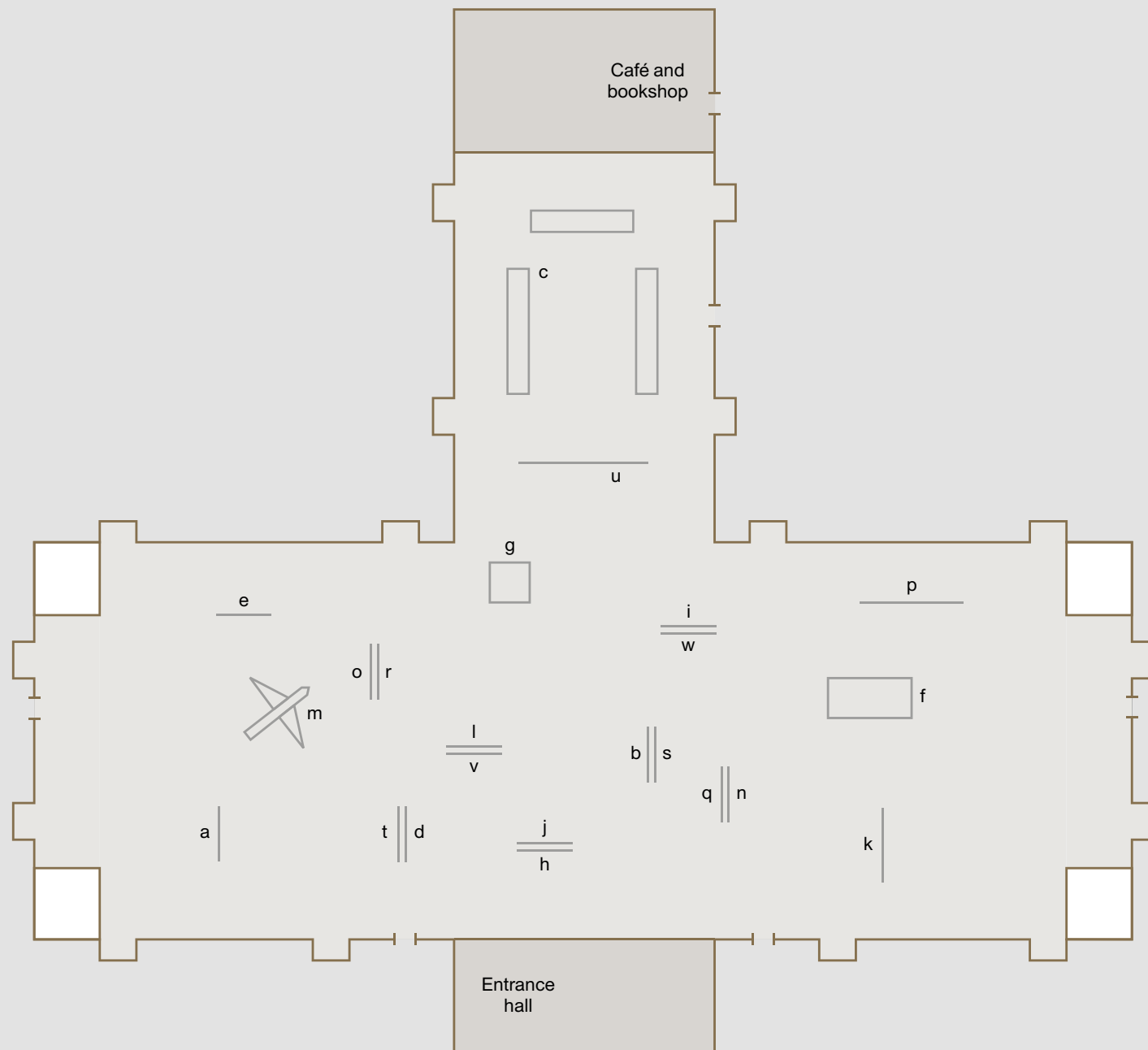
Mute like them
we waft toward the world:
our gazes,
exchanged to be consoled,
fumble forward
beckon us darkly.

Gazeless
your eye into my eye now
silences itself,
wandering
I raise your heart to my lips,
you raise my heart to yours:
what we drink ow
quenches the thirst of hours,
what we are now,
the hours pour into time's cup.

Does it like how we taste?
no sound and no light
slips between us, to tell us.
O stalks, you stalks.
You stalks of night.⁵



Paul Celan photographed by Gisèle Freund
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Gisèle Freund



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|--|---|---|---|
| a. <i>Aus Herzen und Hirnen sprießen die Halme der Nacht</i> , 2018–2021
<i>From Heart and Brains the Stalks of the Night are Sprouting</i> | g. <i>Für Paul Celan–Mohn und Gedächtnis</i> , 2019
<i>For Paul Celan–Poppy and Memory</i> | m. <i>Mohn und Gedächtnis</i> , 2016
<i>Poppy and Memory</i> | s. <i>An die Haltlosigkeiten</i> , 2021
<i>To cling</i> |
| b. <i>Sperriges Morgen</i> , 2020–2021
<i>Obstructive Tomorrow</i> | h. <i>Die Asche der Brunnen von Akra</i> , 2020–2021
<i>The Ash of the Wells of Accra</i> | n. <i>Am letzten Tor</i> , 2020–2021
<i>At the Final Gate</i> | t. <i>Zuversicht</i> , 2018–2021
<i>Confidence</i> |
| c. <i>Arsenal</i> , 2021 | i. <i>À la pointe acérée</i> , 2020–2021
<i>On the Sharp Point</i> | p. <i>Madame de Staël: de l'Allemagne</i> , 2015–2021
<i>Madame de Staël: Germany</i> | u. <i>Als Arche verließ es die Straße</i> , 2020–2021
<i>Like an Ark she left the Street</i> |
| d. <i>Geheimnis der Farne</i> , 2018–2021
<i>Secret of the Ferns</i> | j. <i>Irrenäpfe</i> , 2021
<i>Lunatic-bowls</i> | q. <i>Auf der Klippe–für Paul Celan</i> , 2019–2021
<i>On the Cliff–For Paul Celan</i> | v. <i>Die hellen Steine</i> , 2018–2021
<i>The Bright Stones</i> |
| e. <i>Für Paul Celan–das Geheimnis der Farne</i> , 2021
<i>For Paul Celan–Secret of the Ferns</i> | k. <i>Denk dir–die Moorsoldaten</i> , 2018–2021
<i>Just Think–The Peat-Bog Soldier</i> | r. <i>Beilschwärme</i> , 2020–2021
<i>Hatchet-swarms</i> | w. <i>Weil du den Notscherben fandst</i> , 2018–2021
<i>Because you Found the Woe-Shard</i> |
| f. <i>Occupations</i> , 1969–2021 | l. <i>Gesang der fremden Brüder</i> , 2017–2021
<i>Song of the Strange Brothers</i> | | |

We have listed the different commentaries on the work, notably regarding the use of materials as well as certain paintings and sculptures, from “A to Z”. This arrangement allows one to freely explore the Nave of the Grand Palais Éphémère.

It is the aim of both the artist and the curator to invite us to establish a dialogue between the different works. Their simple installation in the Nave forms a whole, like a network, whose sinuous shape is decided by each visitor.

Finally, we would like to point out that the concept of the cycle is fundamental to Anselm Kiefer’s thought process and to the ancient traditions on which he draws. As a result, the end is a beginning, just as the past, present and future are one, as expressed by Anselm Kiefer: “The future is linked to the past, yet is still separate. When I paint, my movement seems paradoxical: I go into the past and, at the same time, I go into the future. Once, an astrophysicist told me that this was nothing new to him, and even added that we do not only go into the past and the future, but in all directions at the same time.”⁶

Arsenal

A large storage of found and reclaimed objects, used by Anselm Kiefer as sources of inspiration and materials to use in his creations. Here are a few examples:

- Dried flowers which evoke the links made by several authors whom the artist admires. These include the early 17th-century English philosopher Robert Fludd, who established a relationship between constellations and plants. Humanity is poised between Heaven and Earth, the infinity of the cosmos is akin to that of Nature.
- Ashes are a recurring theme in both Celan and Kiefer’s work. They are the residue of burnt matter and attest to a transformation. Along with dust and snow, they cover the world and speak of the course of history, and the necessary work of memory.
- The glass and metal polyhedron evokes the geometric shape in the background of Albrecht Dürer’s engraving *Melencolia*. This plate – a Renaissance masterpiece – can be said to have many meanings, one of which is that it is a symbolic self-portrait of the artist. The 8-sided shape may be an allusion to the planet Saturn, which is associated with lead and melancholy.
- The plaster dress is an attempt to give form to the *Shekhinah*. In Kabbalah, the series of mystic interpretations in the Jewish tradition, this feminine word denotes the presence of God among the people of Israel.
- The fragments of glass draw from this same source and represent “the shattering of the vessels”. During Creation, God left a void that allowed the world to be manifested in several levels of perfection that increase the higher they go. Called *sefirot*, these different levels are represented as concentric circles, some of which break under the power of divine energy.

On the plan: see letter c.

Aeroplane

A paradoxical creation: an aeroplane made of lead cannot fly.

As if hit by projectiles, it is covered with poppies. According to Kiefer, these flowers with hallucinogenic properties tell us: “Remember, remember, always remember”⁸ and forge an additional link with Paul Celan. His volume of poetry, *Mohn und Gedächtnis (Poppy and Memory)*, which the artist often works with, lends its name to this contradictory sculpture.

On the wings are books, also made of lead ; they indicate this will not be a physical flight, but one of another nature. These large volumes placed here and there attest to the importance of the “object” as much as of its “content”. Kiefer, who would have liked to have been a writer or poet, is a voracious reader and owns a vast library of several thousand books.

On the plan: see letter m.

Bunker

Certain works refer to the vast system of fortifications built by the German army during the Second World War, known as the Atlantic Wall. Despite its 13 million cubic meters, it was considered a failure and is made reference to here in the form of a dark bunker, swallowed up by the sand, in the foreground of a painting... or placed inside a display case its walls pierced through by poppies.

Kiefer tells us: “These bunkers, lined up on either side of the Rhine, have fascinated me ever since, as children, we used them as changing rooms before swimming in the Rhine. With their thick walls, their mass of concrete, they are like the archetypes of an inverted and perverted architecture, they crush what is inside them more than they protect it.”

On the plan: see letter g.

Celan's work for Kiefer

The German artist has said that “Paul Celan [...] never leaves me [...]”⁹. He lives in his work’s company, in an almost ritualistic way, attempts to write “his language” on his canvases¹⁰.

Literally so; indeed, Kiefer inscribes poems or extracts on many of his works, but the artist also crystallises images of the poet, something he explains as follows: “I think in images. Poems help me to do so.”¹¹.

Das Geheimnis der Farne (Secret of the Ferns)

This poem by Celan has inspired several of Kiefer’s works over time, two of which feature here.

One of them measures 8.4 x 5.7 metres; in it, we can pick out a snowy landscape from which gold-coloured ferns are emerging. Legend has it that the seeds of these plants offer invincibility and invisibility on St John’s Eve.

Above the plants is an inky sky adorned with a spiral.

It is a golden spiral based on a sequence by Fibonacci, a 12th century mathematician. This numerical sequence has many properties, one of which is to give indications on how to create proportions that are harmonious or, from a mystical perspective, even divine. This sequence can be found in nature – from seashells and ferns to cyclones and galaxies – and in artworks and pieces of architecture such as the Mona Lisa, the Parthenon or Chartres Cathedral.

According to esoteric traditions, using this ratio is a way to bring divine light down into this world. In Hebrew, the word for “light” is *aor* or *aour*, from which we derive the French words “or” (“gold”) and “amour” (“love”), which ultimately mean the same thing. This light (or universal love) is the true gold that all alchemists are searching for, beyond the metal itself, however precious it is (from the French “précieux”, or in the medieval French language of the birds, “près des cieux” meaning “close to the heavens”)¹².

On the plan: see letter e.

Display case

Display cases delimit an inaccessible space in which objects are brought together. They allow us to move around them for a variety of perspectives on this encounter.

They have been widely used since the late 19th century. They were also used in the 20th century by the Surrealists and, later, by one of Kiefer’s compatriots, the visual artist and theorist Joseph Beuys (1921-1986).

Kiefer has been making display cases for many years. He created his first small display cases in the late 80s in his Höpfigen studio in Germany, for a permanent installation entitled *Die Himmelspaläste (The Heavenly Palaces)*. In what he calls “extracts of the world”, he assembles objects and fragments such as dried plants, photographs, lead, fabric, ash, sand and stones.

More recently, he installed six large display cases in the Pantheon as a tribute to Maurice Genevoix. Referring to his display cases, he explains that “display-case glass is a kind of semi-permeable skin that connects the art to the outside world in a dialectic relationship. There is a specific boundary between art and life, an oscillating boundary that often shifts from one to the other. A boundary without which art would not exist.”

On the plan: see letter q.



Madame de Staël: Germany

Anselm Kiefer unpacks the history of his country and presents it to us. As in the work of his friend, the German director Alexander Kluge, he shapes these mementos in a timeless way.

This painting, measuring 13.3 by 3.8 metres, brings together a French woman of letters, the title of one of her books, the former Berlin airport – Tempelhof (in the background of the piece) – and (in the foreground) mushrooms.

Kiefer reminds us that Romanticism was not only co-opted by the Nazi regime but also changed sensibilities and politics beyond its borders.

As such, Madame de Staël paints an admiring portrait of the French in 1813 in her book *On Germany*, the title of which is inscribed in the top left of the painting.

The mushrooms are labelled with the names of key figures of German Romanticism, including the philosopher Fichte, the painter Friedrich, the poet Novalis and the composer and pianist Schumann. Of particular note among these 18th- and 19th-century figures is the name of Ulrike Meinhof (1934-1976). In the 1970s, she was one of the leaders of the Red Army Faction terrorist group.

The vast Tempelhof, built in the interwar years, is associated with the Cold War and the Berlin Airlift organised after the end of the Second World War to replenish supplies in West Germany.

On the plan: see letter p.

Materials

The materials chosen by Kiefer have a symbolic function linked to personal memories, history, literature and mystic traditions such as the Kabbalah.

In a way, they are not mute but silent, attesting to an origin and a metamorphosis. The artist brings them to a certain form of life; rather than destroying them, he seeks to encourage their process of transformation: “the material [...] is an envelope containing a spirit to be discovered.”¹⁴

As such, ferns evoke the forest so beloved by the Romantics, as well as the primal vegetation that connects us with geological or even cosmic times.

Lead is used by alchemists in their quest to transmute ordinary metal into gold. The point is to liberate the spirit within the material of any obstacle. Original light lies within all objects, in a fragmented form, before returning to Unity.

Glass, made of lead oxide, presents the metal in another stage of its metamorphosis: it is transparent and breakable, whereas lead is ductile and opaque.

Occupations

In 1969 Kiefer made *Besetzungen (Occupations)*, a series of actions photographed in France, Italy and Switzerland. He poses, often with his arm raised in a parody of the Nazi salute, dressed in his father's military uniform in front of landscapes, the sea or symbolic monuments such as the Colosseum in Rome.

Through this project, Kiefer puts himself in the spotlight to gain a better understanding of where he comes from. He embarks on the memory of the war and Nazism as a way to question his German identity.

In the exhibition at the Grand Palais Éphémère, Kiefer presents photographic prints from the *Occupations* project, mounted on lead and held inside a large steel “container”. On the outer face of the installation, the artist has hand-written passages from the poem *Wolfsbohne (Wolf's-Bean)* by Paul Celan, which according to his British translator Michael Hamburger, “more starkly than any other poem [...] exposed the wound of his parents' death in internment camps”¹⁵.

On the plan: see letter f.

The poetry of Paul Celan

Paul Celan wrote his poetry in German, his native language. However, in his work this language is reinvented, deconstructed and rebuilt from the rubble. It is fascinating in its mystery, its rhythm and the strange power of the images to which it gives rise.

The lived experience of tragedy and silence enforced by the Holocaust sparked within him the need to create a “counter-language”.

This notion translates the violence experienced by Celan and his loved ones; despite living in Romanian territory, German was an essential part of their Jewish identity and culture. But it was also the language of their executioners, as expressed in the central verse of his most famous poem, *Todesfuge (Death Fugue)*: “Death is a master from Germany”¹⁶.

On the plan: see letters d, g, i, c, and many more.

Left:
Anselm Kiefer, *For Madame de Staël: Germany*, 2015 – 2021, detail. Emulsion, oil, acrylic, gum lacquer, zinc, iron wire and chalk on canvas. 380 × 1330 cm.
© Anselm Kiefer. Photo: Georges Poncet



Ruins

Kiefer does not illustrate history; he conjures it in symbolic form¹⁷. Born in 1945, Kiefer lived and played amongst ruins as a child. They are also a common motif in Romantic painting and poetry, to which he regards himself an heir¹⁷.

For the artist, rubble represents new beginnings and offers a kind of renewal, inferring a cyclical energy of destruction and creation as “ruins, like catastrophes or collapses, are moments when things can start again.”¹⁹ Like the ash that fertilises the soil for the next crop, they carry hope within them.

On the plan: see letter g.

Studio

To Kiefer, the studio is a place of creation and a creation in itself: “(...) you walk around my brain (...), a labyrinth and a reserve of the possible”⁷ Kiefer tells us.

The paintings there are never finished, constantly revisited and worked on. Placed on wheeled racks, they are sometimes made up of several fragments. The artist brings together different stories and time frames in his paintings, at times combining old paintings with recent elements to create new pieces.

Writing in the paintings

Kiefer often writes on his works or adds labels to them (*Arsenal* or *For Madame de Staël: Germany*, for example). At times omnipresent, this writing is an element of the composition, like an essential allusion to reading and knowledge. We therefore find all sorts of references, from numbers to constellations, words, fragments of poems, or “sometimes, [...] Celan’s very name, which is enough.”¹³

The rhythm of symbols and paragraphs becomes part of the painting’s composition, like an element of the landscape, a component of its structure.

The canvas is covered with multiple layers of material, shapes and texts, which solidify and settle to create an archaeology of memory, an account.

On the plan: see letters c. and p.

1 Daniel Arasse, « Anselm Kiefer », Thames and Hudson, London 2001, pages 19-22.

2 Paul Celan, extract from the poem *Aschenglorie* (*Ashglory*), in the volume *Renverse du souffle* (*Breathturn*), translated from the German into French by Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, Paris, Seuil, 2003, page 78.

3 Paul Celan to Yves Bonnefoy: *Paul Celan*, Revue des Belles-Lettres 96, 1972, n° 1-2, page 93.

4 Celan to his friend E. Einhorn, cited by F. Cambon, *Paul Celan ou la passion du réel* (*Paul Celan or the passion of the real*), in: *Europe* 79, n° 861-862, 2001, p. 99-122, p. 106.

5 Paul Celan, *Memory Rose into Threshold Speech: The Collected Earlier Poetry - Celan, Paul*, translated by Pierre Joris, page 71-72

6 *Anselm Kiefer at the Louvre*, Éditions du Regard, 2008, page 63.

7 Sabine Gignoux, *Une visite dans l'atelier d'Anselm Kiefer* (*A visit to Anselm Kiefer's studio*), *La Croix*, 28 March 2011.

8 Pascal Bruckner, *PANTHÉON Maurice Genevoix – Anselm Kiefer – Pascal Dusapin*, Éditions du Regard, 2021, page 96.

9 Ibid.

10 Excerpts from his journal written while preparing for the exhibition at the Grand Palais Éphémère.

11 Edmund de Waal, *Angewintertes: Celan, Kiefer et l'hivernage du langage* (*Celan, Kiefer and the wintering of language*), in the exhibition catalogue *Anselm Kiefer pour Paul Celan* (*Anselm Kiefer For Paul Celan*), Grand Palais Éphémère from 16 December 2021 to 11 January 2022, page 33 and Anselm Kiefer’s acceptance speech for the 2008 Peace Prize of the German Publishers and Booksellers Association.

12 Patrick Burensteinas, *Un alchimiste raconte* (*An Alchemist Speaks*), Éditions Florent Massot, 2017, page 18.

13 Ibid.

14 Guy Duplat, *L'atelier XXL d'Anselm Kiefer* (*Anselm Kiefer's XXL Studio*), *La Libre Belgique*, 25 September 2010.

15 “[...] more starkly than any other poem of his maturity, it exposed the wound of his parents’ death in internment camps” published 1 September 1997 in *The American Poetry Review*

16 Paul Celan, *Fuge de la mort* (*Todesfuge/Death Fugue*), in *Pavot et mémoire* (*Poppy and Memory*), bilingual German and French edition, Christian Bourgois, 1987.

17 See Chris Dercon, *Un Bauhaus pour la prévention de la guerre ? Ça n'existe pas ?* (*A Bauhaus for war prevention? Does that not exist?*), in the exhibition catalogue *Anselm Kiefer pour Paul Celan* (*Anselm Kiefer For Paul Celan*), Grand Palais Éphémère from 16 December 2021 to 11 January 2022, page 20.

18 Guy Duplat, *L'atelier XXL d'Anselm Kiefer* (*Anselm Kiefer's XXL Studio*), *La Libre Belgique*, 25 September 2010.

19 Ibid.

Left: Anselm Kiefer, *Für Paul Celan – das Geheimnis der Farne*, 2021, detail. Emulsion, acrylic, oil, gum lacquer, metal, resin and chalk on canvas. 840 x 570 cm. © Anselm Kiefer. Photo: Georges Poncet

ANSELM KIEFER FOR PAUL CELAN

From 17 December 2021 to 11 January 2022

Open Sunday to Thursday from 10 am to 7 pm, and Friday and Saturday from 10 am to 9 pm.
Saturday 18, Friday 24 and Saturday 25 December: planned early closure at 7 pm.

This exhibition is organised by Rmn – Grand Palais in partnership with Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac and in association with the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2022

This exhibition is organized with the support of KPMG and Mr.Sébastien Breteau.



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Avec le soutien de
Sébastien Breteau

AROUND THE EXHIBITION

Publication

Anselm Kiefer Pour Paul Celan (For Paul Celan)

Intended to immerse readers in the studio and world of Anselm Kiefer, this book reproduces the artist's long-standing dialogue with his greatest poetic influence, Paul Celan, to which the philosopher Emanuele Coccia, the artist Edmund de Waal, the curator Ulrich Wilmes, the filmmaker Alexander Kluge, Chris Dercon and Kiefer himself bring their own unique and enlightening perspective in order to explore the idea of Europe, both in terms of its past and its future.

21 x 32 cm, 120 pages, 60 illustrations, €30

Encounters

Freely accessible with the entry ticket

Friday 17 December at 6.30 pm

The artist Anselm Kiefer in conversation with Camille Morineau, heritage curator and director of Aware (Archives of Women Artists Research & Exhibitions). The conversation is moderated by Chris Dercon, President of the Rmn – Grand Palais and curator of the exhibition.

Saturday 8 January at 5 pm

Reading: *J'ai grandi au bord du Rhin (I grew up on the banks of the Rhine)*

The actor Anne Consigny reads the speech Anselm Kiefer gave in Frankfurt when he was awarded the Peace Prize of the German Publishers and Booksellers Association.

Multimedia

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