

# HALL

ART FOUNDATION

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## A Palace of Memory: Anselm Kiefer Invades MASS MoCA



*Kiefer's "Velimir Chebnykov" series at MASS MoCA; all photos courtesy of the Hall Art Foundation*

**By Nichole Dupont**

There is nothing lighthearted about an **Anselm Kiefer** exhibit. The literal weight of his medium — lead, concrete, dirt — can be felt and seen in the near-monumental scale of his works. And the philosophical heft of these sculptures and paintings rivals their physical

presence. All in a day's work for the German-born artist, who long ago shrugged his shoulders at the Minimalist tendencies of his peers and opted for the darker, more figurative path of a post-WWII consciousness and mathematical mysticism. Museumgoers to **MASS MoCA** will soon see (and feel, and even smell) for themselves Kiefer's monolithic yet fluid work at the museum's newest 10,000-square-foot exhibition space (known as Building 15). From September 27 through the next 15 years, the North Adams museum, in collaboration with the **Hall Art Foundation**, will have on "**temporary**" **exhibit three installations** that span the magnitude and breadth of Kiefer's work.

"About eight years ago we tore down the brick portion of this huge water filtration tank, not knowing what we were going to do with it," says MASS MoCA director Joseph Thompson. "But when we started thinking about a Kiefer exhibit, it became a perfect space to house his work."

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Kiefer's "Narrow Are the Vessels"

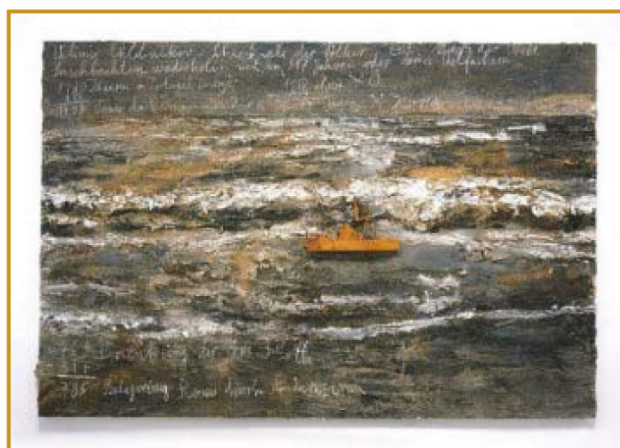
From the outside, the "tank" at the back of the property (at bottom) looks like a run of the mill warehouse space – metal sides, a concrete foundation, slightly pitched

roof — but the interior, thanks to the genius of designer **Bill Katz**, a frequent Kiefer collaborator — is a world unto itself. The huge enclosure is divided by a thick concrete partition, where on one side is Kiefer's wave-like *Narrow Are the Vessels* (above, 2002) and on the other *The Women of the Revolution* (1992), his homage (of lead beds) to woman heroines of all eras and places. Adjacent to these is a galvanized steel pavilion that could easily be mistaken for a mausoleum: A building within a building that houses **Velimir Chebrikov** (2004, below right), a series of 30 paintings of nautical warfare (a part of the entire section pictured at top). While there are no windows on the sides of the space, a quick glance upward reveals two perfectly symmetrical rectangles — skylights — that allow soft, natural light to filter in.

"The skylights give the whole space a completely different vibe. I mean just look at that," Thompson says, waving his hand at the alabaster spectacle of *Narrow are the Vessels*. "It looks like something from an act of war."

The undulating concrete, rebar, and lead sculpture forces a long stare. It is graceful in its configuration, yet the harsh materials and large "broken pieces" lend a coldness.

"It is symbolic, I think, of the endless reverberations of war since the days of Troy," Thompson says. "Yet there is this sexual undertone of rhythm and confluence. There are so many layers to this." That is arguably the touchstone of Kiefer's entire body of work, going as far back as his earliest watercolors, oils, and artist books of the 1970s and 80s (some of which will be **on display at the Williams College Museum of Art**, with selections from the Hall Collection as well as Kiefer's Studio). Layers, both tactile and metaphorical, thicken the entire experience. A stray white glove is taped tenuously to a rugged painting of an epic naval battle, pools of water collect in whitish puddles atop behemoth lead beds honoring women warriors of times past. Every work is weathered. So weathered, in fact, that despite their sturdy appearance, Thompson sees Kiefer's art as an ongoing study in preservation.



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“Stuff falls off the paintings all the time – dirt, bits of straw. He writes directly on the canvas and that can fade. It takes years to sort out,” he says. “Even Kiefer himself has said ‘My art is very difficult to live with.’ Once it’s purchased, it’s all about conservation. It becomes like alchemy.”

Yet Kiefer might not be as concerned about the ruinous effects of time on his work. Nor is **Andrew Hall**, founder of the Hall Art Foundation and “proud father” of these works on loan to MASS MoCA and WCMA.

“All works of art have conservation issues. Watercolors degrade in the sun, photographs deteriorate,” he says. “Kiefer, because of his method, is fairly relaxed about how his works evolve over time. He often puts his paintings outside to weather them. He likes to see that process accelerated.”

Rest assured, there will be no paintings leaned up against the exterior wall of the Building 15. All will be safe inside what promises to be an exhibition for the masses. Visitors cannot help but have a visceral, gut reaction to the scale and brevity (and literary confluence) of heady issues and lead canvases. That is exactly the point, says Hall.

“When you look at the different works they each fulfill a different need. He tackles weighty issues and the end result is evocative. No one will register indifference seeing this work.”

## **Anselm Kiefer @ MASS MoCA**

Opens Friday, September 27, 2013

1040 MASS MoCA Way

North Adams, MA

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