



Anselm Kiefer's 'The Fertile Crescent' shows the remains of a brick factory in the desert, with thousands of those building blocks forming a circuitous wall and pavement.

# Anselm Kiefer takes South Florida

BY ANNE TSCHIDA  
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South Florida is having a love affair with the German artist Anselm Kiefer, a relationship that is giving us a deep and powerful look at the work of one of the greats of contemporary art.

From the NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale to The Margulies Collection, we are able to see more of Kiefer's art, from the 1970s to the present, than anywhere else in the world, which is quite a feat for such a celebrated artist. Born at the end of World War II in Germany, Kiefer grew up in a destroyed land that had to grapple with an awful and traumatic past as it rebuilt itself. That horror, reflected in his work, can be dark. But it also hints at rebirth.

The scope and breadth of his often-monumental art, and its context based in histories and mythologies, can be summed up in just several pieces on display in both locations. The Fort Lauderdale museum is showcasing numerous works all from the Hall Art Foundation, which has never been shown in its entirety until now.

For a comprehensive look at Kiefer's artistic journey, the NSU Art Museum is the place to start. Here, more than 50 works on display include artist books, early paintings and his huge acrylic masterpieces.

The introduction to "Regeneration Series: Anselm Kiefer from the Hall Collection" consists of three towering glass vitrines encasing fallen angels, decked in coats made of ash and white dresses, and incorporating all kinds of references to the Bible, the Kabbalah, Teutonic myths, good and evil. These elements get to the essence of Kiefer's complex work, according to director and chief curator Bonnie Clearwater, who included this exhibit as part of broader programming examining modern mythologies and the issue of regeneration in a post-World War II era.

Clearwater points out that these vitrines, unlike some of the massive paintings and installations, are



CHARLES DUPRAT

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enclosed, making them a little distant; yet they invite introspection, as you can see your own reflection while taking in all the layers of meaning.

The next piece, on a wall and in a room of its own, is one of the most spectacular works in any collection, "Winterwald" (Winter Forest). It's both a painting and a sculpture, with dark trees painted on the canvas and snakeskin, thorn bushes and fake teeth in the foreground. Kiefer often reimagines the forest, long a fascination of Germans and often evoked in fairy tales and histories. Here, Clearwater underscores, the trees are just trunks, their leaves — and therefore lives — chopped off in the image. The snakeskin represents Adam and Eve's — humans' — expulsion from paradise.

And the teeth, they may

be a reference to the Greek myth of Jason and the Argonauts, Clearwater says. Or maybe, like the ash that Kiefer commonly uses in his art, it is a reference to the Holocaust. In Kiefer's work, there is no escaping the past.

In the following rooms, we walk with Kiefer through his plumbing of the past. A gallery of woodcuts includes a large, early self-portrait in which the artist is surrounded by blackened sunflowers in a scorched landscape. In it, he also appears to be pregnant.

The woodcuts are a nod to the place where Gutenberg invented the printing press — mechanization that allowed scenes from the Bible to be distributed on a mass scale. One woodcut is a collage of faces of famous German philosophers, writers and musicians — seemingly



NABIL MOO

'Rising, rising, falling down' is made from asphalt, concrete stones and the remnants of a demolished street in Paris.

questioning how such an enlightened land could produce such murderous regimes.

Kiefer did find some time for pleasure in his art, however. One grouping of small paintings from 1971 are landscapes that highlight the "yin and yang" of romantic composition, according to Clearwater. The sky and water are given equal space, and complement the land; they were dedicated to his wife and the birth of his son.

But that shimmering sky disappears in the final galleries, where Kiefer's now trademark paintings can barely fit on a single wall. They soar like a Wagner opera, but perversely depict a vast scarred land; the paintings are so layered with acrylic paint that they have become sculpture. This is a bombed out universe, with small fires still smoldering. Yet even here are signs of regrowth, with lines bursting from the central focal points that might well be newly tilled fields.

Fields were likely first planted in the Fertile Crescent that hooked from Mesopotamia to

Egypt, and the finale of the exhibit is named after this cradle of Western civilization. "The Fertile Crescent" is so detailed and so expertly crafted it truly must be seen in person; no internet or book imagery will do this painting justice. It shows the remains of a brick factory in the desert, with thousands of those building blocks forming a circuitous wall and pavement. On some bricks the names of ancient sites are written. "Jericho" sits near a crumbling part of the wall.

Blurred spots might indicate the vestiges of a fire — from kilns? — or dust from the parched land. This could be the remnants of the beginnings of our civilized world, or more ominously the "end" of it in the ovens of German concentration camps. And of course, walls formed an integral part of the young Kiefer's divided country. From every angle, this work will reveal something new and thought-provoking.

Travel south to Wynwood, and the latest Kiefer acquisition by the Margulies Collection gets its own room at the front of

## If you go

**What:** "Regeneration Series: Anselm Kiefer from the Hall Collection"

**Where:** NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale, 1 E. Las Olas Blvd., Fort Lauderdale

**When:** Through Sept. 10

**Info:** nsuartmuseum.org

**What:** "Rising, rising, falling down" by Anselm Kiefer

**Where:** 591 NW 27th St., Miami

**Info:** <http://www.margulieswarehouse.com/#/home>

the space. Titled "Rising, rising, falling down," you can literally smell this giant installation, made from asphalt, concrete stones and the remnants of a demolished street in Paris. It is somewhat based on the story of Troy, through the interpretation of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in his novel "Faust." That tale involves Faust falling in love with Helen of Troy, only to destroy everything around him in a fit of jealousy. The mass of broken concrete, rebar and asphalt that cover the floor includes a miniature battleship. Falling from the ceiling are stalks of sunflowers, this time white, that suggests re-emerging life.

This piece was created between 2009 and 2012 and is impressive on its own. But when visitors continue to the back rooms, they find more Kiefers, first exhibited last year.

Back at the entrance installation, you do get the disorienting feeling that this mini-universe Kiefer has created is both imploding and rejuvenating at the same time. His world could not have landed at a better time.

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