

EXHIBITION REVIEW:

Anselm Kiefer: *Angeli Caduti (Fallen Angels)*, Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, 22.04–21.07.2024



After the Anselm Kiefer episode at the Doge's Palace in Venice for the 2022 Venetian Biennale, I knew what to expect when I arrived at the imposing Renaissance Strozzi Palace in Florence. An exhibition and an artist that stands its ground. Thoroughly prepared to clash once again with the 'better half' of art history: the Italian Renaissance. A German artist in the

heart of Renaissance art, already a good title to venture into a memorable visual experience. Because Kiefer's exhibitions are memorable, it's as simple as that. There are no positive or negative attributes, just memorable, because a mark remains a mark whether it's good for you or not. Kiefer's art is like a scar that is always ready to reopen and hurt. He is an artist who meticulously dissects pain and expects everyone to be his partner in this splitting in vivo. He comes from a nation that continues to bleed from the still-resurrected wound of Nazism. Perhaps that is why his interrogations of history and humans are returning to the forefront of contemporary art. History that refuses to die, a hydra of murder and a road of no return. These are Kiefer's desert landscapes: paths without horizon, where the line between sky and earth resembles a leaden rail—not dividing the two

realms, but bringing them mortally close, crushing every will and every action under their clash. A horizon that smashes thoughts until they crack, scattering their livid contents over sordid puddles and charred flora.

In the Strozzi palace, Anselm Kiefer was as strong as we know him. In the haste of a man who knows what he must do, he has built a labyrinth of spectral bodies, gold leaf and heavy lead objects. All on a grand scale, imposing, almost monumental but not quite, as the gigantic dimensions of the works do not always possess the gravity of monumental art. As in Venice, Kiefer tried again to create only iconic images. Each work was self-sufficient in symbol and material: descriptive objects enclosed in huge dioramas, large canvases with lots of gold leaf or bituminous gestures, black, white and reflections. All concerted to mythologically translated falls and damnations, recalling the irreconcilable condition with divinity.

Under all this existential weight, one cannot remain indifferent, even if all the grandeur of the tragic is on the verge of becoming grandiloquent. Because, in Kiefer's case, once you take the small step of evading the entanglements of large objects opulent in meaning, all of his construction becomes "construction." It becomes scenography. Maybe it should. Or maybe it doesn't have to, and then you realize that you are, in fact, stepping outside the object of artistic creation and you may wander, alongside the artist, into the territory of movie-set design. With Kiefer I saw firsthand how art can metamorphose into stage props and fall out of the "canon" of easel painting (whatever that means in Kiefer's case...) into the realm of scenography.

I have also seen scenography in Kounellis's work, but there the tragedy takes precedence, whereas in Kiefer's work the tragedy is lost and remains in suspense until the viewer aesthetically devours the artist's creation, so that later, perhaps, awakened from anamnesis, they may return to the great tragic questions. Kiefer must be understood with all the space in which his works unfold; the spacing between works and their proportions are part of their "scheme" of reading. It's pointless to look at Kiefer in art albums and imagine you know what his art is about, precisely because his work functions as a play, it has a "now and here" because it's on the borderline between art and drama. Whether you're trying to convince yourself that you like it or that you don't, you have to feel small in relation to his work, to witness textures and suspended volumes, to allow yourself to be overwhelmed. Only afterward, as if escaping from a claustrophobic dream, you realize that people will always be fallen angels.

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