ANSELM KIEFER
THE SEVEN HEAVENLY PALACES
2004–2015

#ArtToTheKids
Who is Anselm Kiefer?

Anselm Kiefer is a German artist who lives and works in Paris. For some years he lived in the south of France in an old factory, large enough to hold all of his great works made with different materials, such as sunflower seeds, straw, clay, sand, cement, and lead.

His date of birth is very significant: in 1945 ended one of the most horrific wars, which involved the entire world. You must know that Anselm Kiefer often tells that, when he was a child, he used to play among the rubbles of his destroyed city and that is why art for him has a precious value: it is a way to tell his childhood stories, but also to imagine and dream of future ones.
Take a look at the map and imagine Anselm Kiefer’s journey from Germany to France

Anselm Kiefer
What’s the name of this work?

The installation is called *The Seven Heavenly Palaces 2004-2015* and it is named after an ancient book that belongs to the Jewish religion and which Anselm Kiefer has read during one of his trips around the world. The book tells the story of a man who, departing from Earth, wanted to reach the sky passing through seven palaces, each of which was guarded by an angel.

Seven is considered a magic number and you’ll encounter it many times in this installation. Try to think of the many different occasions in which you have already met it: how many are the days of the week? The colors of the rainbow? The dwarfs in the Snow White fairy tale? The musical notes? The lives of a cat?

Did you know that?

Judaism is one of the most ancient religions which believes in the existence of a single God. Its history began with Abraham and it is represented by the six-pointed star and the seven-branched candleholder to recall the numbers of days in which the world was generated.
What are you going to see in this work?

The Seven Heavenly Palaces 2004-2015 is an installation composed of seven towers and five huge paintings. The towers have been built directly in here.

Imagine a huge construction site where there were nearly 100 people to help the artist: architects and engineers for the project, bricklayers for the construction. To communicate rapidly with everyone, Anselm Kiefer moved from one side to the other riding his bicycle. What is the main material that the artist has used to build them? We will give you a hint: it is the same one used to build bridges, high-rise buildings, and houses’ foundations.

Did you know that?

In comparison to a statue or a sculpture, an installation is often composed of many different elements and sometimes it is big enough to occupy, as in this case, the space of a large garden.
It is reinforced concrete! Indeed, each tower weighs a lot: ninety tons, more or less like fifteen elephants one on top of the other.

If you look at them carefully, you will notice that the towers are all different and it will only take you to count their floors to find out which one is the lowest and which one is the highest. The floors have the shape of a cube and to build them Anselm Kiefer poured the reinforced concrete in large metal tanks which are called “containers”, a bit like building sandcastles on the beach. The containers, on the inside, were light blue or red and traces of paint remained on the towers’ walls.

But how did the artist manage to put one cube over the other? Simple: with some cranes, like those we see in the city when a new building is under construction.

Did you know that?
Concrete, before it becomes solid when in contact with air, it has a soft consistency, similar to the dough used for baking cookies. To prevent it from drying out, the substance is mixed repeatedly inside a machine called concrete mixer, whose drum spins just like a washing machine. When dry, cement is hard as a rock. It is called “reinforced” because an iron grid is hidden inside it and that makes it way more resistant than normal concrete.
Now walk around the towers and observe them from every angle. You will notice that each one of them hides some mysterious object. There is especially one object that appears more than once: it is grey, rectangular and the artist placed it on the base, between floors and on the higher levels. It is a book! Can you see it? There are one hundred and sixty of them and they are made of lead. Anselm Kiefer thinks that books are very important because they tell us stories from the past so that we will never forget them.

And you? What book would you put there?

Now picture yourself starting your journey from the shortest tower. Did you find it? This tower has five floors, the first of which is opened on both sides. If you crunch down in front of the small door, you will see right through it: it feels like you are spying through a keyhole into a quiet landscape surrounded by a starry sky.

Did you know that?

**Lead is a very heavy material.**

According to ancient legends, alchemists, people who tried to find ways to transform metals and to live longer, believed that using the philosopher’s stone, an amulet with immense powers, would make it possible to transform lead into gold!
This tower is peculiar because of the eleven switched off neon signs. According to the Jewish culture, they represent the ways in which God manifests Himself to the world, for example through beauty, intelligence, and power.

Right behind you there is a big painting in which Anselm Kiefer has represented a man with his back turned: he wears a long green coat and he is looking at the horizon. Above him, from left to right, a rainbow stretches out and all its seven colors glow into the sky after the storm.

On the floor in front of the second tower, which consists of six levels, the artist has scattered thousands of small strips of paper and glass.

Did you know that?

Neon is a gas with the ability to become luminous and it can be inserted into pipes of any shape. It is often used to create the signs of the stores we see around the city.
Let’s play a game: try looking at them while slowly moving your head and keeping the rest of your body completely still. See how they sparkle?

Anselm Kiefer has chosen to use glass to represent the stars which, just like lots of tiny bright dots, inhabit the night sky. Now sharpen your sight: on each small rectangle you will see some mysterious codes. These are the scientific names used by NASA astronomers to recognize the stars on the bases of their specific traits, such as their color and size.

Did you know that?

NASA, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, takes care of aviation and aerospace-related activities in the United States of America. Thanks to NASA’s programs, humans have been able to accomplish major scientific goals such as landing on the Moon and creating the Hubble Space Telescope that allows us to observe and study the universe.
Anselm Kiefer has put the same codes in one of the paintings. Did you find them?

In this painting, the artist has depicted a landscape divided into two parts: at the bottom an ancient well situated in the Indian city of Jaipur, at the top the constellations. One of these constellations has the shape of a coffee pot or a blender and it is called Orion.

Did you know that?
The constellation Orion is made up of seven main stars and it can be easily spotted in Italy, especially in winter. According to Greek mythology, it tells the story of a giant hunter.
The third tower has six floors and it is named after Mount Ararat which is located in Anatolia (Asia Minor). The Bible narrates that Noah’s ark had stopped at the top of the mountain after having saved all the world’s people and animals from the Universal Flood. However, if you look at it from a distance, you will notice that instead of the ark, Anselm Kiefer has placed a lead model of a warship on the top floor.
In front of you there is only one other work composed of two big paintings which represent a similar, but not the same, landscape: one is dark and the other is lighter. On both, the artist has thrown a handful of sunflower seeds, and if you get a little closer you will discover that some are painted in gold.

If you look at the two canvases closely, they are joined together by an ancient instrument used to measure the weights of objects. It’s a scale with two plates in perfect balance: on one the artist has placed more sunflower seeds, while on the other he has placed a block of salt.

Imagine being in a field and scattering some salt, you will find that nothing will grow there for a while. If, however, you had thrown some seeds into that field, life would have been born.
The fourth tower is the tallest: how many floors does it have? What is inside it?

Anselm Kiefer has unrolled a long film from the top to the bottom of the tower. If you look closely, you will discover that on some of them he had glued photographs of a cloudy sky and the portraits of some unknown people. Next to the first floor of the tower, there is a round container and an object that looks like an old movie camera. You should know that the artist has also made some films!

The fifth and sixth towers have the same height, and Anselm Kiefer built them close together, as if they were looking at each other. On the floor, the artist has arranged some numbered rocks: try counting them!

Did you know that?
The word “film” originated from the English language. Because of the existence of digital cameras and video cameras, today film is used less and less. Just think that, to create one second of moving image for a cartoon or movie, it is necessary to have twenty-four photographs and to scroll them quickly one after the other.
There are eleven of them, just like the inscriptions on the first tower. The rocks almost look like meteorites that fell straight from the sky.

We have arrived in front of the last tower, which is called *Torre dei quadri cadenti* [Tower of the falling pictures]. As you can see there are, in fact, many pictures: some are hanging high up, others are on the ground. These paintings, however, are missing something: there are no drawings, portraits, or photographs. All that is left are empty frames and glass fragments to which we often entrust our most precious memories. Now close your eyes and search through your memory for a special moment: the first day of school, the first time on a bicycle, in a tent or at the beach. When you have found it, imagine leaving it here, among the artist’s paintings, and it will be preserved forever.

Did you know that?
*Meteorites are charred rocks, usually dark and heavy. Scientists are very interested in them because they are the remains of celestial bodies that fell and landed on our planet. These fragments, the moment they come into contact with the Earth's atmosphere, catch fire and leave a bright trail in the sky, which we commonly call a meteor or shooting star.*

Anselm Kiefer
*Torre dei quadri cadenti* [Tower of the falling pictures], 2004 (detail)
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