EN

Anselm Kiefer
The Seven Heavenly Palaces
2004 – 2015

Pirelli HangarBicocca

Pirelli HangarBicocca is a non-profit foundation, established in 2004, which has converted a former industrial plant in Milan into an institution for producing and promoting contemporary art.

This dynamic center for experimentation and discovery covers 15,000 square meters, making it one of the largest contiguous exhibition spaces in Europe. It presents major solo shows every year by Italian and international artists, with each project conceived to work in close relation to the architecture of the complex, and explored in depth through a calendar of parallel events. Admission to the space and the shows is completely free of charge, and facilitators are on hand to help the general public connect with the art. Since 2013, Vicente Todolí has been the foundation's Artistic Director.

The complex, which once housed a locomotive factory, includes an area for public services and educational activities, and three exhibition spaces whose original twentieth-century architectural features have been left clearly visible: **Shed**, **Navate**, and **Cubo**.

As well as its exhibitions program and cultural events, Pirelli HangarBicocca also permanently houses one of Anselm Kiefer's most important site specific works, *The Seven Heavenly Palaces 2004-2015,* commissioned for the opening of Pirelli HangarBicocca.

The Street View and the image archive of *The Seven Heavenly Palaces 2004-2015* are available on the Google Arts & Culture platform:
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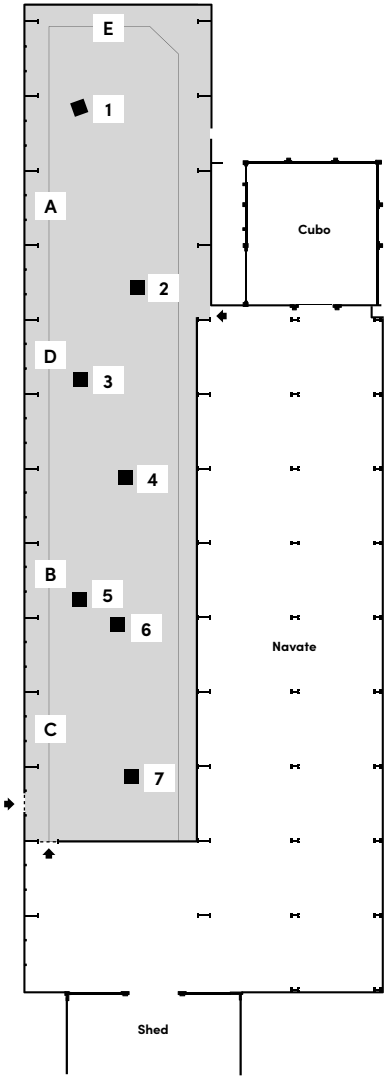
The Seven Heavenly Palaces 2004–2015

Five large canvases – produced between 2009 and 2013, and now exhibited for the first time – enrich and expand *The Seven Heavenly Palaces* (*I Sette Palazzi Celesti*), the permanent installation by Anselm Kiefer, conceived and presented for the opening of Pirelli HangarBicocca in 2004 and based on a project by Lia Rumma. This additional display, curated by Vicente Todolí, reconsiders and confers new meaning on the artist's work.

These paintings form, together with the "towers", a single installation entitled *The Seven Heavenly Palaces 2004-2015* which addresses themes already present in the site specific work: large architectural constructions of the past as man's attempt to ascend to the divine; constellations represented through astronomical numeration. Thanks to this new display, Kiefer's artistic practice is further explored through painting, highlighting considerations central to his poetics, such as the relationship between man and nature; or references to the history of thought and western philosophy. Visitors can pass through the space of the "towers" and experience new works, exploring novel perspectives born of the dialogue between the paintings and the installation.



Anselm Kiefer

Anselm Kiefer was born in Donaueschingen (Germany) in 1945, and dedicated himself to art after studying law and literature. His first works, realized during the second half of the 1960s, were influenced by the gestures and artwork of Joseph Beuys. Between 1993 and 2007, Kiefer moved to Barjac, in southern France, where he transformed a 350,000-square-metre silk factory into his home and studio. Today he works in Croissy and Paris, although many of his large installations are still housed in Barjac, forming a sort of personal museum and *Gesamtkunstwerk* (a total artwork).

In 1971 Kiefer realized his first large-scale painting, in which the artist reinterprets recent German history through references to philosophy and Teutonic mythology. His interest in alchemy led him to insert symbolic and natural materials like lead, sand, straw and seeds into his works. During a trip to Jerusalem in 1984, Kiefer was struck by the mystical Hebrew tradition of Cabala, which would become a recurring theme in his œuvre. He undertook long voyages in Egypt, Yemen, Brazil, India and Central America in search of signs of ancient, disappeared civilizations, which became central to his artistic investigations starting in the 1990s. During this period the artist represented large architectural constructions of the past, for example Egyptian pyramids and Assyrian-Babylonian ziggurats, as ruins, symbols of the inevitable defeat of man's ambition to elevate himself to a superior, quasi-divine state.

The Seven Heavenly Palaces

The name of the site specific installation *The Seven Heavenly Palaces*, 2004 was drawn from the palaces described in the ancient Hebrew treatise *Sefer Hechalot*, the "Book of Palaces/ Sanctuaries," which dates back to the 4th-5th centuries A.D. The volume narrates the symbolic path of spiritual initiation that anyone who wants to become closer to God must undertake. The seven towers – each of which weighs 90 tons and rises to heights varying between 14 and 18 metres – were created from reinforced concrete using the angular construction modules of shipping containers.

The artist has inserted, between the various levels of each tower, lead books and wedges which, compressing beneath the weight of the cement, further guarantee the static nature of the structure. More than mere functional value, for Kiefer the use of this metal has symbolic meaning: in fact, lead is traditionally considered the material of melancholy.

The Seven Heavenly Palaces represents a point of arrival for Kiefer's entire artistic production, synthesizing his principle themes and projecting them into a new, timeless dimension: they contain an interpretation of ancient Hebrew religion; representation of the ruins of Western Civilization following the Second World War; and projections into a possible future through which the artist invites us to face the present.

1 *Sefiroth*

The first of the seven towers to be created, *Sefiroth* is also the shortest (14 metres). The tower culminates with a pile of seven lead books and presents neon lights that form the Hebrew names of *Serifoth*, viewed in Cabala as representations of the expressions and tools of God and forming the very material of creation: *Keter* (the Supreme Crown), *Chochmah* (Wisdom), *Binah* (Deductive reasoning), *Chesed* (Love), *Gevurah* (Power), *Tiferet* (Beauty), *Netzach* (Patience/Tolerance), *Hod* (Majesty), *Yesod* (Foundation of the world), *Malkuth* (Kingdom) and *Daad* (Understanding and Wisdom).

2 *Melancholia*

Melancholia is distinguished most of all by the completion of the last covering, a polyhedron taken from the engraving of the same name created in 1514 by Albrecht Dürer, which became one of the artist's most famous allegorical images. Artists were defined as "those born under Saturn," since people believed that the planet of melancholy represented the artist's contemplative, ambivalent character. At the base of the tower there are the so-called "falling stars," small sheets of glass and strips of paper marked with alphanumerical series that correspond to NASA's classification of celestial bodies.

3 *Ararat*

Ararat is named after the mountain in Asia Minor where, according to Biblical tradition, Noah's ark finally came to rest. The ark is represented by a small model in lead present at the top of the tower, symbolizing a vehicle of peace and salvation, but also a warship, and therefore a vehicle of destruction and desolation.

4 *Linee di Campo Magnetico*

The most imposing tower in the entire installation stands 18 metres high, and is characterized by a lead film running all the way down around it, ultimately reaching the base and laying alongside an empty film reel and a camera made of the same material. The choice of lead, a material through which light cannot pass (and therefore prevents the production of any images), can be interpreted in different ways: from the Nazi attempt to erase Jewish culture and ethnic minorities, to the iconoclastic battle that periodically runs through Western culture, to the Byzantine era all the way to the Lutheran era and the conception, often cited by Kiefer, that "every work of art cancels out those that precede it".

5 6 *JH&WH*

These two towers are disseminated at the base of meteorites that have been numbered with molten lead in irregular shapes, symbolizing the creation myth presented in several Cabala texts. The two towers are equally complementary at their crowns, culminating with writing in neon light detailing respectively the letters "JH" and "WH" which, when united according to the rules of Hebrew phonetics, form the world *Jahweh*, an unpronounceable term in the Jewish tradition.

7 *Torre dei Quadri Cadenti*

The *Torre dei Quadri Cadenti* owes its name once again to the objects present from the top to the base of the construction: a series of wood and lead frames containing thick sheets of glass, many of which have been broken at irregular intervals. Surprisingly the frames do not display any images. Once again, Anselm Kiefer deals with the theme of missing imagery and its potentially multiple cross-references.

Pictorial works

A ***Jaipur*, 2009**

Oil, emulsion, acrylic, shellac and lead on canvas. 660x760 cm.
Courtesy Galleria Lia Rumma, Milan/Naples

The title of this painting is taken from Jaipur, a city Kiefer visited during his numerous travels throughout India. The canvas portrays a nocturnal landscape: on the lower section the artist has painted an architectural structure that reminds the viewer of an inverted pyramid; above, a starry sky. The constellations visible in the sky, connected with lines, are numbered utilizing NASA's classification system. From a thematic point of view, this artwork appears to be the one most closely connected with *The Seven Heavenly Palaces*: the pyramid becomes a symbol of man's vain attempt to move closer to the divine.

B ***Cette obscure clarté qui tombe des étoiles*, 2011**

Oil, emulsion, acrylic, shellac and sunflower seeds on canvas. 610x760 cm.
Courtesy Galleria Lia Rumma, Milan/Naples

C ***Cette obscure clarté qui tombe des étoiles*, 2011**

Oil, emulsion, acrylic, shellac and sunflower seeds on canvas. 610x760 cm.
Courtesy Galleria Lia Rumma, Milan/Naples

In these two paintings from the series *Cette obscure clarté qui tombe des étoiles*, Kiefer portrays a desert landscape, onto which he sets black sunflower seeds – a recurring element in the artist's work. These symbolize fallen stars, black on white, as if they were negative prints. Adding different materials to the surface of the painting, the artist passes beyond the limit between painting and sculpture, seeming to invite the viewer to enter his world.

D ***Alchemie*, 2012**

Oil, emulsion, acrylic, shellac, sunflower seeds, metal object and salt on canvas. 660x1140x40 cm. Courtesy Galleria Lia Rumma, Milan/Naples

Alchemie is made up of two canvases set side-by-side that portray a dry, arid landscape in which the earth appears entirely sterile. A "rainfall" of sunflower seeds is the only sign of life and the hope of regrowth. The element connecting the canvases is a set of balance scales containing salt on one dish and sunflower seeds on the other: opposing symbols of sterility and fertility. These are a clear citation of the artist's interest in alchemy, an esoteric science that aimed to transform lead into gold, and an allegory of man's tension toward perfection and the divine.

E ***Die Deutsche Heilslinie*, 2012-2013**

Oil, emulsion, acrylic, shellac and sediment of electrolysis on canvas. 380x1100 cm. Courtesy Galleria Lia Rumma, Milan/Naples

The largest painting in the Pirelli HangarBicocca's display symbolically and literally portrays – as the title communicates – the history of German salvation. Set on a rainbow trajectory that connects earth and sky and crosses the entire surface, Kiefer transcribes, inserted within a historical-philosophical path running from the thinking of Illuminists to Karl Marx, the names of German philosophers who supported the idea of salvation through the actions of a leader. At the base of the painting stands the figure of a man, portrayed from behind as he gazes, solitary and alone, out over a landscape that echoes the romantic paintings by the artist Caspar David Friedrich. All around are set the names of thinkers who supported the idea that salvation can be achieved through the recognition of one's own individual identity.

The Seven Heavenly Palaces 2004–2015

Based on a project by
Lia Rumma

Additional display curated by
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Thursday to Sunday
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