

JOSEPH BEUYS AND ANSELM KIEFER

Drawings – Gouaches – Book

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This exhibition stages an encounter between two icons of German art, Joseph Beuys (*1921-86) and Anselm Kiefer (*1945), who for the first time are presented in striking juxtaposition. Both created outstanding and expressive works on paper, which came to assume an important role within their total oeuvre. The Küppersmühle Museum is now showing some 200 works from 1948 to 2012, including loans from the New York Metropolitan Museum and the mumok in Vienna.

Anselm Kiefer enrolled as a student of Joseph Beuys at the Art Academy in Düsseldorf. Although he never attended Academy classes, Beuys selected him as his “master-student” and they engaged in an intensive dialogue which came to shape Kiefer's work. Beuys also encouraged Kiefer to continue along his own chosen path. Questions arose relating to the impact of art and its interpretability (which Beuys rejected - at least as a priority - for he was concerned not with interpreting, but with understanding art). A further pre-occupation was the intensive study of objects: Beuys's fascination with plants, to take one example, was no superficial pursuit, but assumed the dimensions of a scientific project. The first step was always the drawing. And it is the drawing which constitutes the crucial key to accessing Beuys's cosmos. With Kiefer the position is similar, except that the book and the processing of the book serve as the key to his total oeuvre. His pictorially graphic and associative representation of the microcosmos and macrocosmos or his historical studies all begin with sketches in his books. Here he was concerned with illustrating such analogies, which we are seeking to highlight in this exhibition.

Underlying many of the works is the question of human destiny, its history and future, as seen from the perspective of the two artists. To a certain extent, the works on show afford an insight into their creative process - for they evince fundamental conceptions, as it were, which both artists explore in other media.

Of central importance for the presentation of Beuys's works are his two panels from the MKM collection, on which he explicates the principle of the social sculpture. In juxtaposition to this is Kiefer's vertical mode of thinking, his sojourns through myths and history, both into the past and into the future. What is the destiny of mankind? Kiefer's works on paper represent paths in the quest for answers to questions which also exercised Beuys.

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