

# Spotlight Research Paper

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Subject: Nossis, 1999, Anselm Keifer

(Medium: Steel, Lead, Plaster, Fabric and Pigment)



*"They shall mount up with wings" ... Isaiah 40: 31*

## The Artist

Anselm Keifer, was born March 8, 1945 in post-World War II Germany. Keifer, a contemporary neo-expressions sculptor and painter, worked in several media (straw, ash, clay, lead, shellac and many others). In 1951 his family moved to Rastatt, Germany where he attended grammar school. As an adult he studied law and Romance languages in Albert-Universitat in Freiberg, Germany.

Keifer was the son of an art teacher and was raised in a Catholic home. As a child of the post war era, as many artists of the same period, he was impressed with the devastation the war left behind and the devastation of the holocaust. Keifer abandoned his academic studies around the mid-sixties and decided to focus his attention on the visual arts.

“The artist stated that the lack of discussion of WWII in school became a creative wellspring for him.”<sup>1</sup> As a young man Keifer traveled around Europe and ended up in Dusseldorf. There he met and became friends with Joseph Beuys. Beuys encouraged him to explore different media, including photography. Beuys was a “Neo-Dadaist and conceptual artist. He was known for his performance art and as was an important part of the Fluxus movement which covered a wide range of artistic forms.

## Interpretation/Compare and Contrast

I suggest, the open book which replaces and/or represents the head of the figures, is a symbol for knowledge. Nossis, was a third century Grecian woman poet, a feminist. As with her poetry, the book is open as an invitation to any and all viewers to delve in to the knowledge contained within. The pages are slightly fluttering, as the wings of a soaring bird. Further, I offer the artist chose lead for the book because knowledge is weighty, substantial and carries with it the obligation of responsibility.

The steel infrastructure gives the sculpture strength and resilience. While her dress is smattered with what appear to be blood, it is if she has been through a battle, a battle of ignorance and inhumanity, but she has come out victorious.

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<sup>1</sup> “The Art Story Foundation”, [ww.theartstory.org](http://www.theartstory.org)

The book is a winged image. Winged images have been important throughout time. As quoted above, from Biblical times on. The Egyptians, the Babylonians, Greeks, Romans, African and Native American cultures have all used images of wings or artifacts that contained images of wings. The question is why? What is about wings? Why are wings such a seemingly universal symbol. I offer that wings symbolizes a release from the bonds of the earth. They allow us to be carried away to higher plane a world of another dimension a higher moral plane.

As in the “Victory of Samothrace”<sup>2</sup> the stance of the sculptor is very strong, striding forward, confidently shouldering the heavy book of knowledge.



She professes that knowledge will push or carry us into the future, informed of the past and victorious.

### Touring this Sculpture

- Provide a brief bio of the artist and his or her times.
- Talk about the name of the piece, with a brief historical context, and ask the viewer why they think the artist chose to name the sculpture as he or she did.
- In this case, ask if the viewer has ever heard of Nossis or the story about Nossis.
- Ask what do the materials used in the sculpture means to them, and/or do they have any meanings for them at all.
- As with any sculpture, the viewers should be encouraged to walk around the object.
- Also, importantly the viewer should be encouraged to look around other objects/art in the vicinity of the pieces and discuss, how or why the curator placed the art in that particular

<sup>2</sup>“A History of World Art”, 1997, First American Edition, DK Publishing Book

location. For example, "Ascension", by Kiefer is juxtaposed with Nossis. Interestingly, both objects depict wings or contain an allegory of wings.

- Ask the question, was this placement intentional or happenstance. Further, what does the curator want us to see or understand?

### **Other Works by Kiefer**

Kiefer's work tends to dark and brooding. It is as if he has not escaped from the devastation in which he found himself in post WWII. His use of dark pigments, decayed plant materials and charcoal for example seem to symbolize the decay of society.



**Urd, Verdandi, Skuld (The Norns)**

1983



Parsifal I

1973



The starry heavens above us, and the moral law within

1969–2010

