



Title: L'Ascension
Artist info: Anselm Keifer, German, born 1945
Provenance: Museum purchase
Medium: Oil, emulsion, acrylic shellac, resin coated ferns on canvas
Date and origin: 1978, Paris, France

Movement: Anselm Keifer's L'Ascension is an example of neo-expressionism whose subjects, often identifiable, are expressed in a rough and violently emotional way.

Anselm Keifer's monumental body of work represents a microcosm of collective memory, visually encapsulating a broad range of cultural, literary and philosophical allusions. Keifer reflects upon Germany's post-war identity and history, grappling with the national mythology of the Third Reich. In L'Ascension, Keifer shows a preoccupation with the German past and intertwines legacies of nationalism and Nazism that scar the German memory.

While many artists and citizens of postwar Germany choose to block out or not talk about the war years, they implied instead that national identity must be rebuilt from scratch after the catastrophic events of the Holocaust. Keifer disagreed. His work is

derived and reflects the mythology, history and image of the German people. L'Ascension is difficult and not entertainment. It is deeply serious, dense with both esoteric, religious and political meaning. The theme is redemption; the question: who or what is being redeemed. Is it the German people? The German institution? Repentance for the horror of the Holocaust? The viewer must decide for himself. Elements of religion appear in the form of written words painted directly on the canvas. "Ave Maria" further extends Keifer's statement on redemption.

German history, particularly the Holocaust, has haunted me throughout my life. Having been exposed from a very early age, the images and stories were so emblazoned in my memory, that to this day, the sheer mention of the Holocaust sends shivers throughout my entire body. Yet, there remains a morbid fascination with the Holocaust. Like those that can't look away from a fatal car accident, I can not forget and look away from this period in German history.

Sources: Gogasian catalog, 2018

The Washington Post, Sunday, July 2, 2006

The Art Story, Amselm Keifer Overview and Analysis, 2018